ARGOSY

Issued Weekly

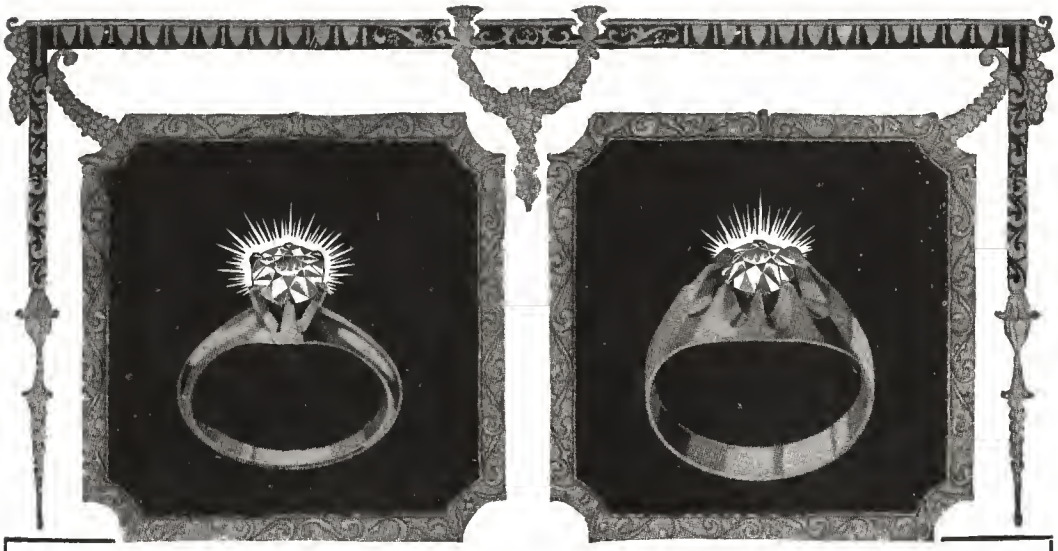
THE TRAIL HORDE

by Charles Alden Seltzer

10¢ A COPY

MARCH 13

$4.00 A YEAR



Send the Coupon

No. 7A1410
This solid gold solitaire is the most popular ladies' ring in the world. Beautifully finished, the essence of good taste. Setting is a flashing Lachnite Gem weighing about one carat.
Price..... $18.75
Deposit..... 4.75
Monthly.... 2.50

-we'll send you a Lachnite

No. 7A1504
This solid gold ring is shaped and finished by hand. No finer or more fashionable ring could be made. It is set with a brilliant Lachnite Gem weighing about 3-4 carat.
Price..... $18.75
Deposit..... 4.75
Monthly.... 2.50

SEND NO MONEY. Just send us your name and address and we will send you, prepaid, on 10 days' trial, a genuine Lachnite Gem mounted in a solid gold ring. These sparkling gems have the eternal fire of diamonds. Their brilliance and hardness are guaranteed forever. We want you to select one of the rings from this advertisement and wear it ten full days at our expense. ***Then, if you can tell it from a diamond, send it back.*** Over 150,000 people have accepted this offer—and have found a way to own exquisite jewelry at a trifling cost.

Pay As You Wish

When the ring comes just make the first small deposit ($4.75) with the postman. This is only a deposit. It is not a payment. The money is still yours. Put the ring on your finger and wear it everywhere for ten full days. Then if you decide to keep it, pay the balance at the rate of $2.50 a month without interest. But if, during the trial, you decide to send the Lachnite back, your deposit will be refunded instantly. You run no risk.

Harold Lachman Co.
12 North Michigan Avenue
Dept. 1073 **Chicago, Ill.**

Send me prepaid Ladies' / Men's Ring on 10 days' free trial. When it comes I will deposit $4.75 with the postman. After 10 days I will either return the ring or send you $2.50 a month until the balance has been paid. Total cost to me, $18.75. If I return the ring within 10 days you will refund me $4.75 immediately. **I enclose my finger size.**

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Send the Coupon!

Don't send us a penny. Just put your name and address in the coupon and tell us which ring you prefer. Be sure to send us your finger size. To get it cut a strip of paper that will just meet around the middle knuckle of your ring finger. Send the coupon now. You will be under no obligations to buy.

Harold Lachman Co. **12 No. Michigan Ave.** Dept. 1073—**CHICAGO**

THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXVIII **ISSUED WEEKLY** NUMBER 4

CONTENTS FOR MARCH 13, 1920

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

ONE COMPLETE NOVELETTE

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

Make

"THE GREAT DISCOVERY"

with

CHARLES V. BARNEY

NEXT WEEK

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered
PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1920.
Entered as second-class matter September 28, 1917, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $3.50 Less 2% cash discount
THE ARGOSY COMB'N: The Argosy . . . All-Story Weekly .	2.00	

April 10th Argosy Combination Forms Close March 17th.

"A New Force In Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Department of the Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

500 AGENTS WANTED AT ONCE for Mitchell's Magic Marvel Washing Compound. 300% profit; enormous repeater. Washes clothes spotlessly clean in ten to fifteen minutes. One thousand other uses in every home. Astounds and delights every woman. Nothing else like it. Nature's mightiest cleanser. Contains no lye, lime, acid or wax. Free samples furnished to boost sales. We positively guarantee the sale of every package. Exclusive territory. **Own your own business.** You cannot fail to make big money. Barber, Ohio, made $600 last month. Send for free sample and proof. Hurry, hustle, grab this chance. L. Mitchell & Co., Desk 331, 1312-1314 E. 61st, Chicago.

AGENTS: Reversible Raincoat. Not sold in stores. Two coats in one. Something brand new. Saves the price of expensive overcoat. Guaranteed waterproof or money back. Big seller. Emil Thor made $134 in one week. We manufacture and make to measure. No capital required. Sample furnished. Parker Mfg. Co., 606 Rue Street, Dayton, Ohio.

$65.00 A WEEK AND YOUR SUIT FREE—IF YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR STARTLING OFFER. Write us at once and we will send you a full line of samples and everything necessary to start at once, absolutely free, postage prepaid. Spencer Mead Company, Dept. 1193, Chicago.

AGENTS—WATERPROOF KITCHEN APRON. NEEDS NO LAUNDERING. Every housewife buys. Dainty, durable, economical. Big money. Sample free. Thomas Mfg. Company, 2107 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS—Make-Em-White Washing and Cleaning Tablets, regular gold mine for spring; profits enormous. Free sample; exclusive territory. B. Thayer, 2145R Clybourn Ave., Chicago.

AGENTS—STEADY INCOME. LARGE MANUFACTURER OF HANDKERCHIEFS and Dress Goods, etc., wishes representative in each locality. Factory to consumer. Big profits, honest goods. Whole or spare time. Credit given. Send for particulars. Freeport Manufacturing Co., 38 Main Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

AGENTS AND CREW MANAGERS. New fast selling food specialty. Livest article. Packed your label. Write or wire. Federal Pure Food Co., 2305V Archer Ave., Chicago.

WE PAY $200 MONTHLY SALARY and furnish rig and expenses to introduce guaranteed Poultry and Stock Powders. Bigler Company, X 506, Springfield, Illinois.

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

OAVIS' LUCKY 'LEVEN SELLING BETTER THAN EVER. $3.35 value sells for $1.25. Mrs. Lewis sold 280 in 7½ days—profit $200. "37" varieties of other big winners—150%-250% profit. Great crew managers' proposition. E. M. Davis, Dept. 58, Chicago.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women. $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—WITH EXPERIENCE. SELL TO CONSUMERS MADE-TO-MEASURE SUITS $27.50, $32.50, and $37.50. Build independent business with big money. Outfits furnished. Midland Tailors, 511 Occidental Building, Chicago, Illinois.

SCIENCE CREATES NEW AUTO WONDER. Solves puzzling problem; no more rain or snow-blurred windshields. Mystic Cloth works like magic; deposits invisible chemical film; one rub keeps glass clear 24 hours. One agent sold 5,000. Security Mfg. Co., Dept. 193, Toledo, Ohio.

AGENTS—WE WANT REPRESENTATIVES TO SELL our exclusive line of Triangle Phonographs. Unique patented design, absolutely no competition as we are the only manufacturers. Sells at sight. Exclusive territory given. We ship C. O. D. Write for booklet A. The Marvel Co., 333 S. Dearborn St., Chicago.

REAL ESTATE—MICHIGAN

LAND! LAND! Make big money farming in Michigan. Best hardwood counties raising grasses, grains, stock, truck and fruit. Only $15 to $35 per acre. Near schools, churches, markets, hardroads, railroad, etc. Small down payment; balance easy terms. The biggest company, the lowest prices, the best land. What more can you ask? Write today for free booklet. Swigart Land Co., Y1245 First Natl. Bk. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. $2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made $813.00 in one month; Nissen $19.00 in three hours; Purviance $207.00 in seven days. $5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y123, Dayton, Ohio.

SALESMEN—CITY OR TRAVELING. Experience unnecessary. Send for list of lines and full particulars. Prepare in spare time to earn the big salaries—$2,500 to $10,000 a year. Employment services rendered Members. National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. 133-C, Chicago, Ill.

LIVE WIRE AGENTS! WE WANT YOU! Take orders for **The Liberty Line of Made-to-Measure** combination **Top-Coats, Raincoats** and **Automobile Coats.** Hundreds of orders waiting for you. Our stock of materials is tremendous and deliveries are prompt. Complete selling outfit and sample coat free. Biggest commissions paid. We deliver and collect. Join our sales force of the biggest money-makers by writing for particulars at once. The Liberty Raincoat Company, Dept. 3C, Dayton, Ohio.

SALESMEN—Side or main line, to sell low-priced 5,000-mile guaranteed tires; 30x3½ non-skid sells for $11.95; other sizes in proportion. Good money-making proposition for live wires. Write Consolidated Tire Co., 618 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SELL WHAT MILLIONS WANT. New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique; enormous demand—30 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue Free. $100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams St., Chicago.

AGENTS: $100 weekly possible introducing new winter automobile fuel. Specially adapted to cold weather. Starts easy. Adds power, mileage and reduces operating expense. Endorsed by thousands. Territory going like wildfire. Act quick. $28 sample outfit free. L. Ballwey, Dept. 2, Louisville, Ky.

AGENTS—$50 WEEKLY AND YOUR SPRING SUIT FREE. Sell our famous popular priced made-to-measure suits; big steady income guaranteed. Complete outfit free. Act quick. Commonwealth Tailors, Dept. 115, 318 West Washington Street, Chicago.

Mexican Diamonds Flash Like Genuine, fool experts, stand tests, yet sell for 1-50th the price. Few live Agents wanted to sell from handsome sample case. Big profits, pleasant work. Write today. Mexican Diamond Imptg. Co., Box SS, Las Cruces, N. Mexico.

MIRACLE MOTOR-GAS AMAZES MOTORISTS. 3 cents worth equals gallon gasoline. Eliminates carbon. 300% profit. Ison, Idaho, wires: "Ship 500 packages. Made $70 yesterday." Investigate. Chas. H. Butler Co., Dept. 197, Toledo, Ohio.

AGENTS—Your own clothes free and $60.00 a week. Start in your spare time. Tailoring business simply great this year. Write American Woolen Mills Company, Dept. 1433, Chicago, for cloth samples of 60 big sensational sellers.

Insyde Tyres—Inner Armor for Auto Tires. Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blowouts. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

SALES AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY COUNTY TO GIVE ALL OR SPARE TIME. Position worth $750 to $1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

YOUNG MAN, WOULD YOU ACCEPT A TAILOR-MADE SUIT just for showing it to your friends? Then write Banner Tailoring Co., Dept. 400, Chicago, and get beautiful samples, styles and a wonderful offer.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED FOR PUBLICATION. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss. or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money-making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy **now!** Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

Classified Advertising Continued on Page 6.

He Earns $50 a Week Repairing Autos

THOUSANDS of men everywhere are doing the same. Many are getting more than this. Some are opening garages of their own. Why don't you get into the auto game too? Men in other lines with a little mechanical ability have doubled their earnings after getting into the fascinating field of auto construction and repairing. Ten times the number of men now engaged in the business are needed. Fine, big paying jobs are waiting for men who "know" to fill them. Read below and find out how you can fit yourself to hold one of these big, man's size jobs in your spare time, without going away from home at a cost of only 7c a day.

Learn at Home

No need to pay for an expensive course that will take you away from home. You can learn the auto game at a cost of one-tenth the expense of going away to school. You don't have to serve an apprenticeship either. Use spare time only and keep right on with your present work. This Library of Automobile Engineering and Tractor Information will make an expert out of you and fit you for the biggest kind of job. It is in six thick volumes, with 2600 pages and 2300 pictures, plans, diagrams and blueprints, etc. Every part of every well known car is explained. They teach you everything the best auto schools teach.

Fifteen great auto engineers prepared these money-making books for men like you. You don't have to know a thing about cars to understand them. Every page is written in plain, everyday language and they begin right at the beginning. With every set we give FREE a consulting membership in our society. You can write our engineers any time and get their help on any proposition on which you get stuck.

FREE Examination!

Mail the coupon for free examination. Don't send any money. We will ship the books (all 6 volumes) by express collect and you can have a whole week to use them as if they were your own. Give them every test you can think of. Take them to your shop. Show them to your friends and ship them back at our expense if you don't want to keep them. If you do keep the books to help you earn more, send us only $2.80. You can send the balance of the $21.80 price the same way—$2.00 each month. Only 7 cents a day. This is your chance to double your earnings—earn two dollars in the same time it takes to get one now. The coupon is your start. MAIL IT TODAY

Everything About Autos

Automobile Motors; Welding; Motor Construction and Repair; Carburetors and Settings; Valves, Cooling; Lubrication; Flywheels; Clutch; Transmission; Final Drive; Steering; Frames; Tires; Vulcanizing; Ignition, Starting and Lighting Systems; Shop Kinks; Commercial Garage Design and Equipment; Electrics; Storage Batteries; Care and Repair of Motorcycles; Commercial Trucks; Gasoline Tractors.

128 Blueprints of Electric Wiring Diagrams

Don't Send Money— Just Mail This Coupon

American Technical Society :: Chicago

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY
Dept. AA-163, CHICAGO, U.S.A.

Please send me the 6-volume set of Automobile Engineering for 7 days examination, shipping charges collect. If I decide to buy I will send $2.80 within 7 days and balance at the rate of $2.00 a month until $21.80 has been paid. Then you will send me a receipt showing that the set of books and the Consulting Membership are mine and fully paid for. If I want to get along without the books, I will notify you after 7 days to send for them at your expense.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Reference .....

Please Fill Out All Lines

Be An Expert Accountant

—The Man Who Directs

Everywhere in business there is need for the man who knows Higher Accounting. To meet the competitive conditions that exist today, waste must be eliminated, accurate cost systems must be installed, economies must be put into effect and the management must have the whole situation charted and shown in figures whenever wanted.

Over 500,000 American concerns today need the services of men who can do this. That shows where opportunity is. Write today for information about the course in Higher Accounting given by LaSalle Extension University.

Learn Higher Accounting By Mail

The LaSalle method will train you by mail under the direct supervision of William B. Castenholz, A. M., C. P. A., former Comptroller and Instructor, University of Illinois, assisted by a staff of Certified Public Accountants including members of the American Institute of Accountants. Analysis and Organization, and the Principles of Accounting, Auditing, Commercial Law and Scientific Management all made clear; and you will be given special preparation for the C. P. A. examinations. You can now learn at home in your spare time while you hold your present position. Pay for the course a little each month if you wish.

LaSalle Students and Graduates

of our various specialized departments can now be found employed by practically all the large railroad and commercial organizations in the United States. For instance—*Pennsylvania R. R. 2102, American Telegraph & Telephone Co. 811, U. S. Steel Corporations 809, Baltimore & Ohio R. R. 646, Chicago & N. W. Ry. 712, Swift & Co. 808, Standard Oil Co. 890, Armour & Co. 864.*

Over 35,000 new students now enroll annually. The LaSalle organization consists of 950 people, including a staff of 450 business experts, professional men, text writers, special lecture writers, instructors and assistants.

Free Consulting Service

As a LaSalle student, you will also be entitled to the free use of our Consulting Service which gives you the privilege of calling on our staff of experts in any department at any time when you need special help or counsel. LaSalle Extension University is a clearing house of business information and through its many highly specialized departments is organized and equipped to render a practical and distinct service which cannot be supplied by any other institution of similar character.

Send Coupon

We will send full particulars, also a free copy of "Ten Years' Promotion in One," a book that has been an inspiration to more than 185,000 ambitious men. Send for your copy now.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
"The Largest Business Training Institution in the World"
Dept. 332-HA **Chicago, Illinois**

Without cost or obligation on my part, please send me particulars regarding your Home Study Course of Training in Higher Accounting and your valuable book for ambitious men, "Ten Years' Promotion in One."

Name .....

Present Position .....

Address .....

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

WRITE NEWS ITEMS AND SHORT STORIES for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

YOU ARE A FAILURE if you are working hard, long hours for low pay or your job is insecure. Why not find out without cost whether you can get a Government Position where pay is better, work easier, hours shorter, and many other advantages? There are chances now for thousands of men and women over 18. Let me give you free information. Just write your name, address and number RQ 2001. Earl Hopkins, Washington, D. C.

MEN TO MAKE Secret Investigations and Reports. Write J. Ganor, Former Government Detective, 113 Danville, Illinois.

LADIES TO SEW AT HOME FOR A LARGE PHILADELPHIA FIRM. Good pay; nice work; no canvassing. Send stamped envelope for prices paid. Universal Co., Dept. 26, Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

FIREMEN, Braksmen, Baggagemen, $140-$200. Colored Porters, by Railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 856 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ills.

RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTORS: $110.00 A MONTH TO START and expenses. Travel if desired. Unlimited advancement. No age limit. Three months home study. Situation arranged. Prepare for permanent position. Write for booklet CM 30. Standard Business Training Institute, Buffalo, N. Y.

STOP OAILY GRIND. START SILVERING MIRRORS, auto headlights, tableware, etc. Plans free. Sure income. Clarence Sprinkle, Dept. 19, Marion, Ind.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

YOU CAN EARN $50 TO $100 WEEKLY WRITING Advertisements. Previous experience unnecessary. Details Free. Write R. P. Koebler, Dept. 73, 156 W. Vernon, Los Angeles, Cal.

AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our **big free catalog.** Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

HEALTH

WHY BE ONLY HALF ALIVE? My free book, Man the Master, tells you how to become a **new being.** Write Ogden Health Institute, 619 Andrews Building, Cincinnati, Ohio.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; $10 TO $500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for Free Illustrated Guide Book and Evidence of Conception Blank. Send Model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS PROCURED—Trade Marks Registered—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. Richard B. Owen, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 2278J Woolworth Bldg., New York.

TYPEWRITERS

NEW, REBUILT AND SLIGHTLY USED TYPEWRITERS $8 up. Portable machines $10 up. Write for our Catalog 260-C. Beran Typewriter Co., 58 W. Washington St., Chicago.

THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXVIII SATURDAY, MARCH 13, 1920 No. 4

The Trail Horde

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Beau Rand," "Square Deal Sanderson," etc.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCING KANE LAWLER.

THERE were fifty thousand acres within view of the ranch-house—virgin grass land dotted with sage, running over a wide level, into little hills, and so on to an upland whose rise was so gradual that it could be seen only from a distance, best from the gallery of the ranch-house.

The first tang of autumn was in the sage-scented breeze that swept the country, and the tawny valley, basking in the warm sunlight that came down from a cloudless sky, showed its rugged beauty to advantage.

Kane Lawler paused at the edge of the gallery and filled his lungs from the sage-laden breeze, and then wheeled to face his mother.

She smiled at him.

"Have you seen Ruth Hamlin lately, Kane?"

Lawler's lips opened, then closed again, tightly. And by that token Mrs. Lawler knew that something Kane had been on the point of saying would never be said. For she knew her son as no other person in the country knew him.

Kane Lawler was big. From the broad shoulders that bulged the gray flannel shirt, down the yellow corduroy trousers that encased his legs to the tops of the boots with their high heels and dull-roweled spurs, Lawler looked what he was, a man who asked no favors of his kind.

Mrs. Lawler had followed him out of the house, and she now stood near him, watching him.

There was in Lawler's lean face as he turned from his mother and peered steadily out into the valley a hint of volcanic force, of resistless energy held in leash by a contrary power. That power might have been grim humor—for his keen gray eyes were now gleaming with something akin to humor; it might have been cynical tolerance—for his lips were twisted into a curious, mirthless half-smile; it might have been the stern repression that had governed him all his days.

Whatever it was, it seemed to be no secret from his mother, for she smiled understandingly, and with pride that must have been visible to any one who watched her.

Massed in the big valley—at a distance of two or three miles from the big ranch-house—was a herd of cattle. Circling them were a number of cowboys on horses. In the huge corral that spanned a shallow, narrow river, were other cattle. These were the result of the fall—or beef—round-up.

For a month there had been intense ac-

tivity in the section. Half the cattlemen in the county had participated in the round-up that had centered upon Lawler's range, the Circle L; and the cattle had been herded down in the valley because of its natural advantages.

There the herd had been held while the neighboring cattlemen engaged in the tedious task of "cutting out," which meant that each cattle owner took from the herd the steers that bore his "brand," with the addition of a proportionate number of unbranded steers, and calves, designated as "mavericks." Then the neighboring outfits had driven their stock home.

"It was a big round-up, Kane," said Mrs. Lawler, watching the herd.

"Eight thousand head," Lawler replied. "We're starting a thousand toward Willets to-day."

"Have you seen Gary Warden? I mean, have you arranged with Warden to have him take the cattle?"

Lawler smiled. "I had an agreement with Jim Lefingwell. We made it early last spring."

"A written agreement?"

"Shucks—no. I never had a written agreement with Lefingwell. Never had to. Jim's word was all I ever wanted from him—all I ever asked for."

"But perhaps Gary Warden's business methods are different?"

"I talked that over with Lefingwell when he sold out to Warden. Jim said he'd already mentioned our agreement to Warden, and that Warden had agreed to carry it out."

"But suppose Warden has changed his mind?"

Lawler laughed shortly. "No man goes back on his word in this country. But from what I've heard of Warden, he's likely to. If he does, we'll drive the stock to Keppler, at Red Rock. Keppler isn't buying for the same concern, but he'll pay what Lefingwell agreed to pay. We'll ship them, don't worry."

"Red Rock means a five-hundred-mile drive, Kane."

Lawler laughed. "You're anticipating, mother. Warden will take them."

Lawler grinned and stepped off the gallery. A few minutes later he emerged from the stable carrying a saddle, which he flung over one of the top rails of the corral fence. He roped a big, red bay, smooth, glossy, with a coat that shone like a flame in the clear, white light of the morning sun.

The bay was built on heroic lines. He was tall and rangy, and the spirit of a long line of thoroughbred ancestors was in him. It showed in the clear white of his gleaming, indomitable eyes, in his thin, sensitive nostrils, and long, shapely muzzle; in the contour of his head and chest, and in his slender, sinewy legs.

Man and horse were big, capable, strong-willed. They were equipped for life in the grim, wild country that surrounded them. From the slender, powerful limbs of the big bay, to the cartridge-studded belt that encircled the man's middle, with a heavy pistol at the right hip—they seemed to typify the ruggedness of the country, seemed to embody the spirit of the wild.

Lawler mounted, and the big bay whistled as he pranced across the ranch-house yard to the big corral where some of the cattle were confined. Lawler brought the bay to a halt at a corner of the corral fence, where his foreman, Blackburn, who had been breakfasting in the mess house, advanced to meet him, having seen Lawler step down from the gallery.

Blackburn was of medium height, swarthy, with heavy brows under which were keen, deep-set eyes. His mouth was big, expressive, with a slightly cynical set in repose.

"We're hittin' the trail in about an hour," said Blackburn. "Are you wantin' me to put 'em through, or are we takin' two days to it, as usual?"

"Two days," advised Lawler. "There's no hurry. It's a bad trail in spots, and they'll want to feed. They'll stand the trip on the cars better if they've had plenty of grass."

"Gary Warden is keepin' Lefingwell's agreement with you, I reckon?" asked Blackburn. He eyed Lawler intently.

"Of course." Lawler caught the expression of his foreman's eyes, and his brows drew together. He added: "Why do you ask?"

"Just wonderin'," hesitated Blackburn; "just wonderin'. You seen this here man, Warden?"

Lawler had not met Warden; he had not even seen the man from a distance. That was because he had not visited Willets since Warden had bought Lefingwell's ranch and assumed Lefingwell's position as resident buyer for a big Eastern live-stock company.

Lawler had heard, though, that Warden seemed to be capable enough; that he had entered upon the duties of his position smoothly, without appreciable commotion; he had heard that Warden was quiet and "easy-going," and that as a cattle buyer he seemed to "know his business."

This information had reached Lawler's ears through the medium of neighboring cattle owners, and he was not prepared to form an estimate of Warden until he had an opportunity personally to talk with him.

"Well," went on Blackburn, "them that's looked him over don't hesitate to say he don't measure up to Jim Lefingwell's size."

"Jim was a mighty big man—in size and principles," said Lawler.

"Now you're shoutin'! There wasn't no man bigger 'n Jim, sideways, edgeways, or up an' down. I reckon any man would have a hard time measurin' up to Jim Lefingwell. Mebbe that's what's wrong with Warden. Folks has got Jim Lefingwell on their minds, an' they're not givin' Warden what's comin' to him, them bein' biased."

He squinted at Lawlor. "Folks is hintin' that Warden don't own Jim Lefingwell's ranch at all; that some Eastern guys bought it, an' that Warden's just managin' it. Seems like they's a woman at the Lefingwell's old place, keepin' Warden company. She's Eastern, too, they say. Got a old maid with her to keep her company—a chapperown, they say—which ain't in no ways illuminatin' my think-tank none. Which is a chapperown?"

"A kind of moral monitor, Blackburn," grinned Lawler. "Some folks need them. If you're thinking of getting one—"

"Bah!" Blackburn's eyes were vitriolic with disgust. "I sabe what you are hintin' at when you gas of morals—which I'm a heap acquainted with because I ain't got none to speak of. But I'm plumb flabbergasted when you go to connectin' a battleship with morals. Accordin' to my schoolin', a monitor is a thing which blows the stuffin' out of—"

"A monitor of morals could do that," gravely said Lawler. "In fact, according to the best authorities, there have been many monitors who have blown the stuffing out of the reputations of their charges."

Blackburn gulped. He was puzzled, and his eyes were glazed with the incomprehension which had seized him. Twice again as he watched Lawler's grave face he gulped. And then he eyed Lawler belligerently.

"I reckon them monitors is Eastern? I've never saw one gallivantin' around these parts."

"They're a lot Eastern," assented Lawler. "I've never seen one, but I've read about them in books. And once my mother saw one—she tells me the East raises them by the hundred."

"That accounts for it," declared Blackburn; "anything which comes from the East is likely to be a heap shy on hoss sense."

He now squinted at Lawler, watching him keenly.

"Accordin' to report Joe Hamlin ought to go around draggin' one of them monitors."

Blackburn shrewdly noted the quickening of Lawler's eyes, and the dull red that stole into his face.

"What do you mean, Blackburn?"

"Davies an' Harris hit town agin last night, an' comin' back they run plumb into Joe Hamlin. He was in the upper end of the box arroyo. He'd roped an' hog-tied a Circle L cow an' was blottin' our brand out."

"What happened?" Lawler's lips were set in grim lines.

"Nothin'—followin' your orders regardin' the cuss. Davies an' Harris let him go—after warnin' him. Somethin' ought to be done. It ain't addin' a heap to the morals of the outfit for the men to know a man can rustle cattle that promiscuous—an' the boss not battin' an eye over it.

This is the fourth time he's been caught with the goods—to say nothin' of the times he's done it without nobody gittin' wise—an' the boys is beginnin' to ask questions, bein' a heap puzzled because somethin' don't happen to Joe."

Lawler's face was expressionless. Except for the flush in his cheeks he seemed to be unaffected by Blackburn's words. His voice was a trifle cold when he spoke:

"I'll attend to Hamlin. I'll stop at the Two Bar on my way to Willets. By the time you reach town with the cattle I'll have the deal with Warden clinched."

Blackburn nodded, and Lawler wheeled the bay, heading him northward.

As he rode, Lawler's face changed expression. He frowned, and his lips set stiffly.

What he had been almost on the point of telling his mother was that he knew why Ruth Hamlin had refused him. It was pride, nothing less. Lawler suspected that Ruth knew her father was a rustler. In fact, there had been times when he had seen that knowledge lying naked in her eyes when she looked at her parent. Accusation and disgust had been there, but mingling with them was the persistent loyalty that had always governed the girl; the protective instinct, and a hope of reformation.

The pride that Mrs. Lawler had always exhibited was not less strong in the girl's heart. By various signs Lawler knew the girl loved him; he knew it as positively as he knew she would not marry him while the stigma of guilt rested upon her parent. And he was convinced that she was ignorant of the fact that Lawler shared her secret.

That was why Lawler had permitted Hamlin to escape; it was why he had issued orders to his men to suffer Hamlin's misdeeds without exacting the expiation that custom provided. Lawler did not want Ruth to know that he knew.

He sent the big bay forward at a steady, even pace, and in an hour he had crossed the sweep of upland and was riding a narrow trail that veered gradually from the main trail to Willets. The character of the land had changed, and Lawler was now riding over a great level, thickly dotted with bunch-grass, with stretches of bare, hard sand, clumps of cactus, and greasewood.

He held to the narrow trail. It took him through a section of dead, crumbling lava and rotting rock; through a little stretch of timber, and finally along the bank of a shallow river—the Wolf—which ran, after doubling many times, through the big valley of the Circle L.

In time he reached a little grass level that lay close to the river. A small cabin squatted near the center of the clearing, surrounded by several outbuildings in a semi-dilapidated condition, and a corral, in which there were several horses.

Lawler sent Red King straight toward the cabin. When he reached the cabin he swung off and walked toward the door, his lips set in straight lines, his manner decisive.

He had taken only several steps when a voice greeted him, coming from the interior of the cabin—a man's voice, snarling, venomous:

"You come another step, Kane Lawler, an' I'll bore you!"

Lawler halted, facing the door. The door was closed, but a little slide in the upper part of it was open. Through the aperture projected the muzzle of a rifle, and behind the rifle appeared a man's face—dark, bearded, with eyes that gleamed with ferocious malignance.

CHAPTER II.

HER FATHER.

LAWLER stiffened. There was no mistaking the deadly threat of the rifle and the man's menacing manner. Lawler's face was pale, but his eyes were unwavering as they looked into those that glared out at him through the aperture in the door.

Guilt and fear were the emotions that had driven Hamlin to this rather hysterical threat. Lawler resisted an impulse to laugh, though he felt a pulse of grim humor shoot through him.

To his knowledge—excepting Hamlin's predilection to rustle cattle—the man was harmless. He had never been known to draw a gun, even in self-defense, and Lawler was convinced that there was not sufficient provocation for him to break one of

the rules that had governed him until now. Hamlin might be goaded or frightened into using the rifle, but Lawler had no intention of goading or frightening him.

In fact, being aware of the reason for Hamlin's belligerence, he had no intention of acquainting the man with his knowledge of what had happened the night before. At least, not at this instant.

Lawler grinned; the grin was not forced, for Hamlin's action in barricading himself had its humorous side.

"I reckon you don't know me, Hamlin?" he said.

"I know you mighty well, Lawler," snapped Hamlin; "you heard me mention your name."

"Then you've got a new way of greeting your friends, eh—with a rifle. Well, put it down and open the door. There's some things I want to say to you."

"What about?" asked Hamlin, suspiciously. Overwhelming every other thought in his mind was the conviction that Davies and Harris had apprised Lawler of what had happened the night before, and that Lawler had come to capture him, single-handed.

"About Ruth."

The wild gleam in Hamlin's eyes began to dull. However, he was still suspicious.

"You seen any of your men this mornin'—Davies or Harris?" he asked.

"Davies and Harris went to town last night. I reckon they didn't get back yet. What's Davies and Harris got to do with me visiting you?"

"Nothin'." There was relief in Hamlin's voice. The muzzle of the rifle wavered; the weapon was withdrawn and the slide closed. Then the door opened, and Hamlin appeared in it, a six-shooter in hand.

"If you're foolin' me, Kane Lawler, I'll sure bore you a plenty!" he threatened.

"Shucks." Lawler advanced to the door, ignoring the heavy pistol, which was shoved close to his body as he stepped into the cabin, Hamlin retreating before him.

"Hamlin, you're losing whatever sense you had," said Lawler as he halted near the center of the big room. There were three rooms, their doors opening from the one in which Lawler and Hamlin stood.

"Meanin' what?" demanded Hamlin, nervously fingering the six-shooter.

It was clear that Hamlin was impressed with the repressed force that he could see in Lawler; with the slumbering energy that Lawler's lithe, sinewy body suggested; with the man's complete lack of fear, and with the cold confidence that swam in his steady eyes.

Hamlin did not know at this minute whether or not he had meant to shoot Lawler. He believed that if Lawler had told him he had come to take him for blotting out the Circle L brand in the arroyo the preceding night he would have killed Lawler.

But he was not sure. Something about Lawler made the thought of shooting him seem ridiculous. It would take a lot of provocation for *any* man to kill Lawler, for something about Lawler seemed to hint that it couldn't be done.

"Meaning that you are old enough to know that you can't keep on rustling my cattle without getting in trouble."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hamlin, his breath hissing through his teeth as he sucked it in with a gasp. "You sneaked on me, damn you!"

He threw the muzzle of the pistol up, his body stiffening, his eyes glittering with the malignance that had been in them when he had been looking out at Lawler through the aperture in the door.

"You know about that deal, an' you've come for me. You tried to fool me, eh—tellin' me that you didn't see Davies an' Harris. Well, damn your hide, you ain't goin' to take me; I'll blow you to hell first!"

Lawler laughed. His eyes were steady and unblinking as he watched Hamlin; they bored into Hamlin's with a compelling intensity that brought a conviction of futility into the man's soul. They were cold eyes—cold as icebergs, Hamlin thought as he watched them; but they seemed to flame also, to flame with a fire that was cold as the ice in them.

The terrible power of them, and the promise of volcanic action behind them; the awful confidence that shone in them; their magnetism, holding Hamlin's against his

will, deadening his muscles, jumbling his thoughts—brought chaos into the man's brain, and he stood, his mouth agape with wonder over the thing that was happening to him, as Lawler walked steadily to him. He made no resistance as Lawler deliberately wrenched the pistol from his hand and deliberately walked to a side wall and placed it upon a shelf.

Hamlin stood, nerveless and pallid, for an instant, watching Lawler's movements—until Lawler turned and faced him again. Then he staggered to a chair and dropped into it, lowering his head dejectedly, sitting with his hands folded, completely subjected.

Lawler would hang him, now. Lawler would take him to the Circle L and turn him over to Blackburn and the other men of the outfit. And Blackburn would hang him, for Blackburn had told him he would. Or, if Lawler didn't take him to Blackburn he would take him to the sheriff. He would not be hanged then, but he would go to the new prison at the capital, and Ruth would have to stay on here to do the real suffering for his misdeeds.

"You damned fool!" came Lawler's voice into the vacuumlike stillness of the cabin. "You haven't nerve enough to shoot a coyote!"

Hamlin knew it; he knew, now, at least, that he hadn't had nerve enough to shoot Lawler. He cringed under Lawler's contemptuous tone. And then he became aware that Lawler was speaking again.

"I'm giving you another chance. I'm letting you off, clean. For Ruth's sake. Look here, Hamlin!"

Hamlin's chin was caught in an iron grasp and he found himself looking into the terrible eyes. He saw grim pity in the eyes, and he shuddered.

"Ruth knows you're stealing cattle. Everybody knows it, now. Who is buying them?"

"Singleton."

"Singleton!" Lawler's voice snapped with astonishment. "Dave Singleton, Lefingwell's old range boss?"

Hamlin nodded. And then the grip of Lawler's fingers on his chin relaxed. He heard Lawler step back, but he did not lift his head for a few minutes, during which a strained silence descended upon the room. Then he covertly raised his head, to see Lawler standing with his arms folded over his chest, watching him.

Lawler had not suspected Singleton. Between himself and Singleton there had always been a lack of ordinary cordiality, a constraint closely approaching dislike; but Lawler had never entertained a suspicion that Lefingwell's range boss was dishonest.

Hamlin was a moral weakling, he knew. Everybody in the Wolf River section knew it. Hamlin was lazy and shiftless, seemingly contented to drift along in an aimless way, regardless of what happened to him. There was at Hamlin's feet some of the wealth that other cattlemen of the district were gaining. He had proved on a quarter section of good grass land amid plenty of water, and yet he chose to steal cattle rather than raise them.

Lawler's pity for the man was stronger than the resentment he felt. Hamlin was Ruth's father, though looking at him as he sat dejectedly in the chair, Lawler found it hard to realize the relationship.

"How long has Singleton been buying cattle from you?"

"About a year. I sold him what stock I had, before—before I got to runnin' my brand on other folks' stock, an' he hinted he wasn't particular whose cattle I got, long as he could get 'em under the market price."

"Does Singleton come here?"

"Sometimes—mostly nights."

Lawler's quick conclusion was that Ruth must have seen Singleton at the cabin, must have noted that the visits seemed surreptitious. Perhaps she had watched, convincing herself of her father's guilt. Lawler had wondered how she had gained the knowledge she seemed to have, and Singleton's visits must be the explanation.

Hamlin had bowed his head again after a swift glance at Lawler. He stiffened when he felt Lawler at his side again, for there had come into the atmosphere of the cabin a premonitory chill which warned him that Lawler was on the verge of action.

But he was not prepared for what happened.

Lawler's sinewy hands fell on his shoulders. The fingers bit deeply into the flesh, drawing a groan of pain from Hamlin. He was lifted to his feet—off his feet, so that he dangled in the air like a pendulum. He was suspended by the shoulders, Lawler's fingers gripping him like iron hooks; he was shaken until his feet, powerless to retard the movement, were flopping back and forth wildly, and his teeth rattled despite his efforts to clench them. It seemed to him that Lawler would snap his head from his shoulders, so viciously did Lawler shake him.

Then suddenly the terrible fingers relaxed, and Hamlin reeled and swayed, dizzy and weak from the violence of movement. He was trying to keep his feet solidly on the floor when he felt Lawler's fingers at his throat.

To his astonishment, the fingers did not sink into the flesh. They touched his throat lightly, and he dazedly met Lawler's eyes, burning, flaming with a passion he had never seen in them before. And Lawler's voice was dry and light, but steady—so steady and cold that Hamlin realized that only the man's complete mastery of himself had kept him from committing murder.

"Hamlin, I ought to kill you. I'm letting you off on one condition—that you break off with Singleton, and that you keep silent about the things we both know. If you confess to Ruth that you've been rustling cattle, or if you tell her—or hint of it—that I know you've been rustling—I'll tear you apart!

"You're like a lot of other damned, weak-kneed polecats. You've got a girl who is good as gold. And you're making a regular hell for her. She's wise to what you've been doing—she suspects you. And from now on you're going to show her that she was wrong—that you're straight and square.

"There's a job for you over at the Circle L—if you want it. I'll throw things in your way; I'll put you on your feet again—give you stock and tools, and pretend I've sold them to you. I'll do anything to keep you square. But if you tell Ruth, I'll kill you as sure as my name is Lawler!"

"I'm agreein'," said Hamlin thickly. "I ain't wanted to do the things I've been doin'. But things didn't go right, an' Singleton—damn it, Lawler; I never liked the man, an' I don't know *why* I've been doin' what I have been doin'. But I've wanted to do somethin' for Ruth—so's she could quit teachin' an' live like a lady. I thought if I could get a bunch of coin together that mébbe she'd have—"

"She'd see you dead before she'd touch it," scoffed Lawler.

"Mebbe I'd be better off if I was dead," said Hamlin glumly.

"You'll die, right enough, if you don't keep your word to me," grimly declared Lawler.

He strode to the door, leaped upon Red King, and rode away.

Inside the cabin, Hamlin got to his feet and swayed toward the door, reaching it and looking out, to see Lawler loping Red King toward Willets.

CHAPTER III.

WARDEN GRINS.

THERE had been a day when Willets was but a name, designating a water tank and a railroad siding where panting locomotives, hot and dry from a long run through an arid, sandy desert that stretched westward from the shores of civilization, rested, while begrimmed, overalled men adjusted a metal spout which poured a stream of refreshing water into gaping reservoirs.

In that day Willets sat in the center of a dead, dry section, swathed in isolation so profound that passengers in the coaches turned to one another with awe in their voices and spoke of God and the insignificance of life.

But there was a small river near the water-tank—the headwaters of the Wolf—or there had been no tank. And a prophet of business, noting certain natural advantages about the place, had influenced the railroad company to build a corral and a station.

From that day Willets became assured of a future. Cattlemen in the Wolf River

section began to ship stock from the new station, rather than drive to Red Rock—another shipping point five hundred miles east on the same railroad.

From the first it became evident that Willets would not be a boom town. It grew slowly and steadily until its fame began to trickle through to the outside world—though it was a cattle town in the beginning, and a cattle town it would remain all its days.

Therefore, because of its slow growth, there were old buildings in Willets. The frame station bore an aged appearance. Its roof sagged in the center, its walls were bulging with weakness. But it stood defiantly flaunting its crimson paint above the wooden platform, a hardy pioneer among the moderns.

Business had strayed from the railroad track; it had left the station, the freight-house, the company corral, and some open sheds, to establish its enterprises one block southward. There, fringing a wide, unpaved street that ran east and west, parallel with the gleaming steel rails, business reared its citadels.

Willets buildings were not imposing. One-story frames predominated, with here and there a two-storied structure, or a brick aristocrat seeming to call attention to its substantial solidity.

Willets had plenty of space in which to grow, and the location of the buildings on their sites seemed to indicate that their builders appreciated the fact that there was no need for crowding. Between each building was space—space suggestive of the unending plains that surrounded the straggling town.

Willets sat, serene in its space and solitude, unhurried, uncramped, sprawling over a stretch of grass level—a dingy, dirty, inglorious Willets, shamed by its fringe of tin cans, empty bottles, and other refuse—and by the clean sweep of sand and sage and grass that stretched to its very doors. For Willets was man-made.

From the second story of a brick building that stood on the southern side of the street, facing the station, Gary Warden could look past the red station into the empty corrals beside the railroad track. Jim Lefingwell, Warden's predecessor, had usually smiled when he saw the corral comfortably filled with steers. But Gary Warden smiled because the corral was empty.

Warden was standing beside a flat-topped desk at one of his office windows. Warden was big, though not massive. He seemed to have the frame of a tall, slender man, and had he stayed slender his frame would have carried his flesh gracefully. But Warden had lived well, denying himself nothing, and the flesh which had been added had collected in flabby bunches, drooping his shoulders, sagging his jaws, swelling the back of his neck.

And yet Warden was not old; he had told some new-made friends in Willets that he was thirty-five. But he looked older, for a certain blasé sophistication that gleamed from his eyes and sat on the curves of his lips did much to create the impression of age.

Warden dressed well. He was coatless, but he wore a shirt of some soft, striped material, with a loose, comfortable-looking collar and neat bow tie. His hair was short, with bristles in the roll of fat at the back of his neck; while at his forehead it was punctiliously parted, and plastered down with exactness.

Warden was not alone. At another window, her elbows on the sill, her hands crossed, her chin resting on the knuckles of the upper one, sat a woman.

She was young, slender, lissom. There was grace in every line of her, and witchery in the eyes that watched Warden with a sidelong gaze. She, too, was hatless, seemingly conscious of the beauty of her hair, which was looped and twisted into glistening strands that fell over her temples and the back of her neck.

As she watched Warden, who was smiling at the empty corral, she withdrew her elbows from the window-sill, twisted around, so that she faced Warden, and idly twirled the felt hat that she had taken from her lap.

"Does something please you, Gary?" she asked with slight, bantering emphasis.

Warden's smile broadened. "Well, I'm not exactly displeased."

"With Willets—and the rest of it?"

"With that corral—over there." He pointed.

"Why, it's empty!"

"That's why."

"Why, you are pleased! That is odd. As a buyer, I should think you would be more pleased if the corral were full—had cows in it. That is what you are here for, isn't it?"

"Yes," grinned Warden; "to keep it empty until it is filled with steers at my price."

"Oh, bother." The woman yawned. "I am glad it is you and not I who is to deal with these clodhoppers. I should turn sour —or laugh myself to death."

"Are you getting tired of it already, Della?"

"Dreadfully tired, Gary. If I could see one interesting person, or a good-looking man with whom I could flirt—"

"Don't forget our engagement, Della," warned Warden.

She laughed, shooting a mischievous glance at him. "Oh, it would be harmless, I assure you—mere moral exercise. Do you imagine I could lose my heart to one of these sage-brush denizens?"

"Not you, Della," grinned Warden; "that isn't your style."

The girl yawned again, and got to her feet, smoothing her ruffled skirts. Then she walked to a mirror on a wall near the door, and spent some time placing the felt hat on her head at a precise angle, making certain that the coils of hair under it were arranged in the most effective manner. She tucked a stray wisp into the mass at the nape of her neck, patted the glistening coils so that they bulged a little more—smiling with satisfaction at the reflection in the glass.

"Well, good-by, Gary. I left Aunt Hannah at Corwin's store. She'll be afraid I've eloped with you. No," she added, as Warden advanced toward her; "no kisses now. I'll look in again before we leave town."

She opened the door, and as it closed she flashed a smile at Warden. Then he heard her descending the stairs. He watched the closed door for an instant, frowning disappointedly; then he strode again to one of the front windows, grinning as his gaze rested on the empty corral.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SINGLETONS GO TO SCHOOL.

ACCIDENT or design had placed the schoolhouse at the eastern edge of the town. The invisible power which creates the schoolhouse seemingly takes no account of time or place. It comes, unheralded, unsung, and squats in the place where the invisible power has placed it, and instantly becomes as indispensable as the ungainly youth that occupies it.

All youth is not ungainly. Ruth Hamlin was considering the negative proposition as she stood on the little platform in front of the blackboard just before noon, calmly scrutinizing the faces of the score of pupils who composed her "class."

About half of her pupils, she decided, were worthy of the affection she had bestowed upon them. The remainder were ungrateful, incorrigible hoodlums.

A good teacher must not be vindictive; and Ruth was trying her best to keep alive the spark of mercy and compassion that threatened to splutter completely out.

Despite her apparent calm—the outward sign of cold self-control—Ruth's face revealed indications of the terrific struggle that was going on within her. Her face was pale, and though her eyes seemed to smile, there was a gleam far back in them that suggested thoughts of force, instant, vicious. Also there was wrath in them—wrath that threatened to break with volcanic fury.

The girl was of medium height, and yet she seemed to be almost tall as she stood on the platform. She was erect, her head was held high. She was slender, with a gracefully rounded figure, but as she stood there, her muscles straining, her chest swelling with the passion she was trying to suppress, she must have appeared Amazonic to the culprits whose crimes had goaded her to thoughts of corporal punishment.

It was not difficult to single out the culprits. There were two, and they sat defiantly in their seats, sneering their contempt

of the teacher's wrath, advertising their entire disregard for the restraining influence of rules.

Both were boys. The larger, dirty, unkempt, with an uptilted nose and belligerent eyes, was fully as tall as Ruth. He was broad and muscular, and it was evident that consideration for his size was one influence that had thus far delayed the punishment he no doubt merited.

It was evident, too, that the culprit suspected this, for as Ruth's hesitation continued he grew bolder and more contemptuous. And now, having divined that Ruth would not attempt to inflict the punishment she merited, the young man guffawed loudly.

"Shucks," he sneered, winking piratically at his brother culprit; "she's tryin' to run a whizzer in on us. She ain't goin' to do *nuthin'!*"

"Jimmy Singleton, advance to the platform!"

Ruth's voice came sharply, quavering with the passion she had been suppressing until now.

She stood, rigid until Jimmy got out of his seat with elephantine deliberation, and shuffled to the edge of the platform, where he stood, grinning defiantly.

Ruth raised the lid of her desk and took out a formidable willow branch, which she had cut only the day before, in anticipation of the present incident, from a tree that grew beside the Wolf near her cabin.

She had known for many days that she would have to punish Jimmy, for Jimmy had been growing daily less amenable to discipline. But she had hoped that she would not be compelled to punish him—she had escaped that disagreeable task so far.

But there was no alternative, and though she grew deadly white and her legs grew weak as she drew out the willow switch, she advanced on Jimmy, her eyes flaming with desperate resolution.

As she reached Jimmy's side, he lunged toward her. He struck viciously at her with his fist, the blow landing on her shoulder near the neck. It had been aimed at her face, but she had somehow dodged it.

The force of the blow brought Jimmy against her, and he seized her around the waist and attempted to throw her. She brought the switch down sharply on Jimmy's legs as they struggled, and the sting of the blow enraged the boy. He deliberately wrenched himself loose; then leaped forward, swinging his arms viciously.

He had not struck the girl fairly, but she was in a daze from the rapid movement, and she was not aware of what was going on around her, centering all her energy in an attempt to keep the boy from striking her face.

But she suddenly became conscious that a big form had loomed close to her; she heard a deep, angry voice saying:

"I'll attend to you—you young pirate!"

And then Jimmy was jerked backward, away from her; and she saw Kane Lawler standing not more than two or three paces from her. His right hand was twisted in Jimmy's collar; and there was an expression of cold rage on his face—despite the smile he gave her when she looked at him—that chilled her.

But she made no objection when Lawler walked to a chair that stood on the platform, dragging the now protesting Jimmy after him by the scruff of the neck. There was something of majestic deliberation in Lawler's movements, she thought, as he seated himself in the chair and placed the struggling Jimmy across his knees.

Ruth had never entertained a bloodthirsty thought, but her passions were very near that point when she saw Lawler's large, capable right hand begin to descend upon Jimmy's anatomy. She gasped at first, at Lawler's temerity; and then she stepped back and watched him, her heart singing with approval.

Lawler's capable right hand descended many times with a force that brought dismal howls from the unlucky culprit—so many times and with such force that the girl began to fear that Jimmy would be fatally injured. Jimmy likewise entertained that fear, for his howls grew more shrill, laden with mingled terror and pain, until the piercing appeal of them sent the other pupils out of their seats and into the open, shouting that Jimmy was being "killed."

Then, just when Ruth decided to protest, Lawler swung Jimmy around and placed

him upright upon the platform. What Lawler said to Jimmy Ruth did not hear, so low was his voice. But she heard Jimmy's reply, as did some of the children who still lingered outside the door:

"You've walloped me, damn you; you've walloped me!"

Jimmy ran frenziedly to the door, plainly in fear that he would be "walloped" again if he did not make his escape; and when he reached the door he shrieked through unmanly tears:

"My paw will wallop you; you locoed maverick—you see if he don't!"

Jimmy vanished. There was no doubt in Lawler's mind, nor in Ruth's, that he had gone to relate his trouble to his "paw"; and that paw would presently appear to exact the lurid punishment Jimmy desired.

But thoughts of imminent punishment were not in Lawler's mind as he faced Ruth. There was nothing but humorous concern in his eyes and voice.

"Did he hurt you, Ruth?"

"I—I think not," she smiled, "but I have no doubt that he would have thrashed me soundly if you hadn't come when you did. I am sorry it happened, but I just *had* to discipline him. He was setting a bad example for the other scholars."

"Teaching school isn't the best job in the world, is it?"

"Decidedly not." She looked quickly at Lawler, for something in his voice hinted of subtlety; and when she saw his eyes agleam with the whimsical humor that was always in them when he spoke of his hope of winning her, she knew that he had attacked her obliquely.

Her cheeks flushed, and she dropped her shining eyes from his, murmuring low:

"But I am going to keep at it for the present, Kane."

"I was hoping—" he began. But he paused when she shook her head.

"Is that what you rode to town for?" she asked.

"That's the big reason," he returned. "The other is that I'm here to sell Gary Warden my cattle."

"I don't like Gary Warden!" she declared.

His eyes twinkled. "I've heard that before—two or three times. By the time I see him I'll be disliking him, myself."

The "class," Ruth now noted, had departed—undoubtedly to follow Jimmy Singleton; or perhaps seizing the opportunity so suddenly presented to play truant. At all events, the school was deserted except for themselves.

But Ruth did not seem to mind, nor did Lawler express any regret for the absence of an audience. He grinned widely at Ruth.

"You'll not get them back to-day, I reckon. If you're riding home I'd be pleased to—"

"But you have business with Gary Warden!" she reminded him.

"That can wait. Blackburn won't have the herd here until to-morrow."

Her eyes were glowing with pleasure, and the faint flush on her face betrayed her still more. But she looked at him resolutely.

"I shall stay the day out, whether the children come back or not," she said. "And you must not permit me to interfere with business."

It cost her something to tell him that, for the lure of him had seized her long ago—during the first days of their acquaintance, in fact—and she was deliberately refusing the happiness that was offered her—because she could not confess her father's crimes to this man, and because she would not marry him unless he knew.

And not even then, perhaps. For she knew something of Lawler's high ideals, the rugged honesty of him, his straightforwardness, and his hatred for the thieves who stole cattle—thieves like her father. She couldn't marry him, feeling that each time he looked at her she must feel that he would be thinking of the misdeeds of her parent. That would be unbearable.

He took a step, and stood beside her, looking down at her gravely. He took one of her hands, she permitting it, lifting her eyes to his as he drew the hand toward him. The hand lay inertly in his left; he covered it with his right and held it thus in a warm, firm grip. Then he met her eyes, his own swimming with a gentleness that made her draw a slow, deep breath of wonder.

This minute had been anticipated by both of them; for many months, when they had stood close together, they had felt the imminence of surrender to the longing that dwelt in both of them.

But the girl resisted, as she had resisted many times. Her breath came rapidly, and the captive hand trembled as she tried to withdraw it.

"No; not now, Kane!" she protested; "not now—please!"

Lawler laughed lowly, and held the hand for an instant longer, while he compelled the girl's eyes to meet his.

"All right," he said; "not now. But the time will come. Something is worrying you, Ruth. But you don't trust me enough to tell me what it is. Some day—when you discover that nothing but your love means anything to me; when you realize that I love you enough to take you in spite of the thing that worries you—you'll tell me. And then we'll forget it."

He stepped back, releasing her hand, for he had heard a commotion outside—Jimmy's voice, high-pitched, carrying a note of savage triumph; and the voices of the other scholars in a shrill murmur, coming closer.

Ruth started, clenched her hands, and backed to the desk, where she stood, her eyes wide, her breath coming fast, a picture of apprehension and dismay.

Her big eyes went to Lawler, who grinned faintly at him.

"I reckon Jimmy's coming with his 'paw,' he said.

A big man, tall, massive, muscular, with heavy shoulders that seemed to droop with the weight of his great, long arms, stepped into the room through the door that Jimmy had gone out.

The man's head was big, like the rest of him, and covered with shaggy, tawny hair which seemed to bristle with truculence. His chin was huge, square, and sagging a little, his lips were in a hideous pout; and his eyes, small, black, with heavy brows that made them seem deep-set, were glittering with passion.

He paused just inside the door, seemingly to accustom his eyes to the subdued light of the room. His long arms were hanging at his sides, the fingers clenching and unclenching close to the heavy pistols he wore—one at each hip. As he stood there, blinking his eyes at Ruth and Lawler, Lawler spoke.

"Come in, Singleton," he said.

Ruth was still standing at the desk. Her arms were now outstretched along it, her hands gripping its edge. She started at the sound of Lawler's voice, amazed at the change that had come in it—wondering how—when it had been so gentle a few minutes before—it could now have in it a quality that made her shudder.

She saw the big man's eyes widen, noted that his shoulders sagged a little when he heard Lawler's voice; observed that there seemed to come an appreciable lessening of the tension of his taut muscles. She marveled that the sound of one man's voice could have so calming an effect upon another—that it could, at a stroke, seemingly, cool the white-hot rage that had seized the man.

But there was no doubt that a change had come over the big man. His shoulders sagged further. A suggestion of a mirthless smile began to tug at the corners of his mouth; he unclenched the fingers of his hands.

"It's you, eh?" he said, gruffly. "My kid was sayin' some one in the schoolhouse had walloped him, an' I was aimin' to find out who it was. I reckon he's gone."

"I 'walloped' him, Singleton."

Lawler's voice was gentle. In it was still a trace of that quality that Ruth had sensed, softened now slightly by the knowledge that Singleton's rage had slightly cooled.

"There isn't a heap to be said, I reckon," Lawler resumed, as Singleton stood rigid again. "Your boy was trying to wallop his teacher. I happened to look in, and I had to take a hand in it, just to keep things even. He had it coming to him, Singleton."

Lawler's manner was conciliatory, even mildly placative. "I figured on saving you a job, Singleton."

Singleton's face reddened.

"Lawler, I figger to lick my own kid."

"Singleton, I reckon it can't be undone, and you'll have to make the best of it.

You and I have never got along well, but I want you to know I didn't know it was your boy I punished."

"Hell's fire!" snarled Singleton. "What you interferin' in the schoolhouse for? What business you got buttin' in?"

It was clear that Singleton's rage was again rising. He must have noticed that the scholars had crowded around the door, and that Jimmy was watching him, no doubt disappointed that the salutary punishment for which he had hoped was being unnecessarily delayed.

Undoubtedly the presence of the children contributed to Singleton's anger; but at bottom was his old dislike of Lawler—a dislike that the incident of the whipping had increased to hatred.

It was plain that Singleton meditated violence. Yet it was equally plain that he feared Lawler. He had never seen Lawler draw a gun, but he had heard tales of the man's ability with the weapon. There lingered in his mind at this minute—as it had dwelt during all the days he had known Lawler—the knowledge that Lawler's father had been a gun-man of wide reputation, and that he had taught his son the precision that made him famous in the deadly art.

That knowledge had always exerted a deterring influence upon Singleton; there had been times when he would have drawn a gun on Lawler had it not been that he feared the son might be as swift as the father.

So Singleton had assured himself; he was not afraid of Lawler, he was afraid of the reputation of Lawler's father. Singleton was reluctant to admit that it was not Lawler's gun that he was afraid of, but something that was in the man himself—in his confident manner, in the level glance of his eyes; in the way he looked at Singleton—seeming to hint that he knew the man's thoughts, and that when the time came—if it ever came—he would convince Singleton that his fears were well founded.

And, singularly, Singleton knew it; he knew that if he drew his gun on Lawler, Lawler would anticipate the movement; Singleton had become convinced of it—the conviction had become an obsession. That was why his rage had cooled so suddenly when he had entered the schoolroom.

But he knew, too, that Lawler never sought trouble; that within the past few years—or since Singleton had known him—he had never drawn the gun that reposed at his hip. And that knowledge brought the rage surging back into Singleton's veins. He knew he could *talk* to Lawler; that he could say some of the things that were in his mind—that had been in his mind all along; and that he would be safe so long as he kept his hands away from his guns.

As he snarled his questions at Lawler he took a step toward him. His eyes were truculent again, his lips in the pout that had been on them when he had entered. If Lawler didn't go for his gun he need have no fear of him. For he was bigger than Lawler, stronger. And if he could goad Lawler into using his fists instead of the dreaded gun he had no doubt of the outcome.

"Singleton," replied Lawler, answering the questions that had been hurled at him, "what I am here for is my business. I don't feel a heap like explaining it."

"Business — bah!" sneered Singleton. "I reckon the business that brought you here could be carried on better with no kids around."

Singleton saw a pin-point of fire glow in Lawler's eyes. But he noted with venomous satisfaction that Lawler's hand did not move upward the slightest fraction of an inch toward his gun, and he laughed discordantly, taking another step toward Lawler, so that he would be close enough to strike when the time came.

"Lawler," he said, sticking his face close to the other's, his eyes glittering with the malignant triumph that had seized him over the conviction that Lawler would not try to draw his gun, "I's figgerin' on wallopin' you like you walloped my kid. Understand? I'm aimin' to make you fight—with your fists. I'm goin' to knock hell out of you, that's just exactly what I'm goin' to do!"

Lawler had not moved. Had Singleton not been so obsessed with thoughts of an easy victory he might have noted that the pin-point of fire that had glowed in Lawler's eyes had grown larger, and that his muscles had stiffened. Also, had Singleton been

observant at this minute he must have seen a faint grin on Lawler's lips.

"Hell's fire!" snarled Singleton; "won't anything make you fight? There's that girl there—Ruth Hamlin. You think she's got a right to be proud as she is. Lawler, you don't know her; you don't know what's goin' on over there at the Two Bar—Hamlin's ranch. This here school-teachin' of hers is only a blind—a blind, I tell you! A blind for other things that her an'—"

Ruth's sharp, protesting cry was drowned in a sudden swish as Lawler struck. His fist had shot upward with the weight of his body behind it, landing fairly on the point of Singleton's chin, snapping his teeth shut with a clack.

Singleton's head went back, his body rose from the floor. He came down with his knees unjointed, his head sagging on his chest; came down in a heap, and tumbled forward upon his face, his arms limp, the fingers slowly spreading.

For an instant Lawler stood over him, pale, his eyes agleam. Then when Singleton did not move he turned to Ruth, smiling faintly.

"Go home, now, Ruth, before this beast comes to life. Go out and send the children away. I've got something to say to Singleton."

Ruth looked intently at him, saw there would be no use of pleading with him, and walked to the door, dragging the children away from it, telling them to go home.

Jimmy Singleton, terrorized by the thing that had happened to his father, needed no urging. He ran, whimpering, toward town, the other children following.

Ruth went to the shed where she kept her pony, threw saddle and bridle on him, and led him to the step, where she usually mounted.

The door of the schoolhouse was closed. Trailing the reins over the pony's head, she ran to one of the windows—a small one in the center of the side wall, dust-begrimed, with one pane of glass missing.

Peering within, she saw Singleton sitting up, staring dazedly around, supporting himself with his hands, an expression of almost laughable bewilderment on his face.

Lawler was standing near him—big, stern, seeming to wait for Singleton to rise before he spoke to him.

And while Ruth watched, Singleton staggered to his feet. He swayed uncertainly as he faced Lawler; and when Lawler advanced toward him he cringed and staggered back, raising one arm as though to ward off an expected blow.

Ruth heard his voice; it was a whine, tremulous with fear:

"Don't hit me again, Lawler; I wasn't meanin' anything!"

And then Ruth saw that Singleton must have been struck a second time, for high up on his left cheek was a huge gash that had suffused his chin and neck with blood. She remembered that while saddling and bridling her pony she had heard a sound from within the schoolhouse, but she had thought then that it must have been Lawler moving a chair. Plainly, Singleton had recovered from the first blow, and had received another.

Then Ruth heard Lawler's voice. It was low, vibrant with passion:

"Singleton, I ought to kill you. I will kill you if you ever tell that girl that you know her father is a rustler. Damn your hide, she knows it now—and it's breaking her heart!

"I'm warning you. Don't you ever go near the Two Bar again. Don't you ever buy another steer from Hamlin. Don't even speak to him. I'll kill you sure as hell if you do!"

Ruth reeled away from the window. She got on her pony somehow, taking care to make no sound, for she did not want Lawler to know that she had heard. Once on the pony she sent the little animal rapidly away, toward the Two Bar—away from Lawler and from that happiness for which she had hoped despite the hideous knowledge which for months had tortured her.

Inside the schoolhouse Singleton was standing, beaten by the man over whom he had thought to triumph easily; by a man whose pallid face and blazing eyes conveyed to Singleton something of the terrible power and energy of him when aroused.

Singleton did not think of his guns, now; he was aware of nothing but the great awe that had seized him. And as Lawler

watched, saying nothing more, Singleton turned from him and slunk out through the door.

CHAPTER V.

ATTRACTION AND REPULSION.

WHEN Lawler finally emerged from the schoolhouse-door there was no one about. Far down the street, in front of a building, he saw a group of children. Lawler recognized the building as the Wolf Saloon—so named because of the river that ran through the town. He had no doubt that Singleton had entered the building—that would explain the presence of the children in front of it.

But Lawler merely glanced toward town; he turned instantly and gazed long into the great stretch of plain that ran eastward. He caught sight of a dot on his right, so far away that it was dim in the haze of distance, and he knew Ruth had followed his advice.

Lawler watched the dot until it vanished and when he turned again—to mount Red King—his color had returned, though something of the mighty passion that had gripped him was still swimming in his eyes.

He sent Red King into town at a slow lope, not even looking toward the Wolf as he passed it, but hearing subdued voices that seemed to die away as he drew close.

He brought Red King to a halt in front of the brick building in which Gary Warden had his office, dismounted, tied Red King to a hitching rail, and strode to an open doorway from which ran the stairs that led to the upper floor. A gilt sign on the open door advised him of the location of Warden's office.

With one foot on the stairs, ready to ascend, Lawler heard a woman's voice coming from the landing above:

"Well, good-by, Gary," said the voice; "I'll see you to-night."

Lawler heard a man's voice answering, the words unintelligible to him; then the woman laughed banteringly.

Then came the sound of a door closing, and the light tread of a woman's foot on the stairs.

Lawler had halted when he heard the woman's voice; he now stepped back in the narrow hallway, against the open door, to give the woman room to pass him.

Turning his back to the stairs, unconcernedly waiting, subconsciously realizing that the woman was descending, he gazed past the station building to see the empty corrals on the other side of the railroad track. His eyes narrowed with satisfaction—for there would be room for the thousand head of cattle that Blackburn and the other men of the Circle L outfit would bring to Willets in the morning. There would be no delay, and no camp on the edge of town, awaiting the emptying of the corral.

When he heard the woman's step at the bottom of the stairs he turned and faced her. She was looking straight at him, and as their eyes met he saw hers widen eloquently. She paused as she started to pass him, and it seemed to him that she was about to speak. He smiled gravely, puzzled, hesitant, for he felt her manner indicated that she knew him, or was mistaking him for another. He paused also, and both stood face to face, silent.

Lawler noted that the woman was beautiful, well-dressed, with a manner unmistakably Eastern. He decided that she had mistaken him for some one of her acquaintance, for he felt assured he had never seen her before. He bowed, saying lowly:

"I beg your pardon, ma'am; I reckon it's a case of mistaken identity."

"Why," she returned, laughing, "I thought sure I knew you. Are you quite certain that I don't?"

There was guile in her eyes; so far back that he could not see it, or so cleverly veiled with something else that he was not aware of it. It seemed to him that the eyes were merely engaging, and frankly curious. He did not see the admiration in them, the elation, and the demure coquetry.

"I reckon you'll have to be the judge of that, ma'am. You certainly have the advantage of me."

"You are—" Her pause was eloquent.

"I am Kane Lawler, ma'am."

He looked into her eyes for the disappointment he expected to find there, and saw only eager interrogation.

"Oh, then I don't know you. I beg your pardon."

Lawler grinned. "I reckon there's no harm done."

He bowed again, noting that she looked intently at him, her eyes still wide, and filled with something he could not fathom. And when half way up the stairs he looked back, curious, subtly attracted to the woman, he saw her standing in the doorway, ready to go out, watching him over her shoulder. He laughed, and opened the door of Gary Warden's office.

Warden was sitting at his desk. He turned at the sound of the door opening, and faced Lawler inquiringly.

Perhaps in Lawler's eyes there still remained a trace of the cold passion that had seized him in the schoolhouse; it may have been that what Lawler had heard of Gary Warden was reflected in his gaze—a doubt of Warden's honorableness. Or perhaps in Lawler the resident buyer observed signs which told him that before him stood a man of uncommon character.

At any rate, Warden was conscious of a subtle pulse of antagonism; a quick dislike—and jealousy.

Warden could not have told what had aroused the latter emotion, though he was subconsciously aware that it had come when he had noted the rugged, manly strength of Lawler's face; that the man was attractive, and that he admired him despite his dislike.

That knowledge aroused a dull rage in him. His cheeks flushed, his eyes reflected it.

But Warden's smile was engaging, welcoming. He managed it so cleverly that many men, watching him, might have been deceived.

In Lawler's keen eyes, however, glowed understanding—a knowledge of Warden's character that vindicated the things he had heard about the man—the tentative suggestions that Warden was not a worthy successor to Lefingwell.

That knowledge, though, would not have bothered him had he not seen in Warden's eyes something that seemed to offer him a personal affront. As quickly as Warden had veiled his eyes from Lawler, the latter had seen the dislike in them, the antagonism, and the rage that had stained his cheeks.

He had come to Warden's office with an open mind; now he looked at the man with a saturnine smile in which there was amused contempt. Assuredly the new buyer did not measure up to Jim Lefingwell's size, as Blackburn had suggested.

Therefore, aware that he could not meet this man on the basis of friendliness that had distinguished all his relations with Jim Lefingwell, Lawler's voice was crisp and businesslike:

"You're Guy Warden?"

At the latter's short, affirmative nod, Lawler continued:

"I'm Kane Lawler, of the Circle L. I've come to make arrangements with you about buying my cattle. I've got eight thousand head—good clean stock. They're above the average, but I'm keeping my word with Jim Lefingwell, and turning them in at the market price."

"That's twenty-five dollars, delivered at the railroad company's corral, in town here," said Warden.

He looked straight at Lawler, his face expressionless except for the slight smile that tugged at the corners of his mouth—which might have been indicative of vindictiveness or triumph.

"Thirty," smiled Lawler. "That was the price Lefingwell agreed to pay."

Warden appeared to be blandly amused.

"Lefingwell agreed to pay thirty, you say? Well, Lefingwell always was a little reckless. That's why my company asked for his resignation. But if you have a written contract with Lefingwell—in which it appears that Lefingwell acted for the company, why, of course we'll have to take your stock at the contract price. Let me see it, if you please."

"There was no written contract; I had Jim Lefingwell's word—which was all I ever needed."

"Lefingwell's word," smiled Warden. "Unfortunately, a man's word is not conclusive proof."

"Meaning that Lefingwell was lying when he told you he'd agreed to pay thirty dollars for my stock this fall?"

"Oh, no. I don't insinuate against Lefingwell's veracity. But the company requires a written agreement in a case like this—where the former representative—"

"We won't argue that," interrupted Lawler. "Jim Lefingwell told me he'd had a talk with you about my agreement with him, and Jim said you'd carry it out."

"Mr. Lefingwell did not mention the matter to me."

"I'd hate to think Jim Lefingwell lied to me," said Lawler, slowly.

Warden's face grew crimson. "Meaning that I am a liar, I suppose," he said, his voice quavering with sudden passion.

Lawler's level gaze made him stiffen in his chair. Lawler's smile, cold and mirthless, sent a pulse of apprehension through him, and Lawler's voice, slow, clear and distinct, forced the blood from his face, leaving it pale:

"I don't let any man twist my words so that they mean something I don't intend them to mean, mister man. If I intended to call you a liar, I'd have said it to you mighty plain, so there'd be no doubt in your mind about it. So far as I know, you are not a liar. I'm telling you this, though: A man's word in this country has got to be backed by his performances—and he's got to have memory enough to know when he gives his word.

"I reckon that where you come from men give their word without knowing it. Maybe that's what happened to you when Jim Lefingwell spoke to you about his agreement with me. Anyway, I feel charitable enough toward you to advance that explanation. You can take that for what it seems worth to you. And I won't be bothered any, no matter which way you take it."

Lawler turned toward the door. On the threshold he paused, for Warden's voice reached him:

"You'd better sell at twenty-five, Mr. Lawler."

Warden's voice was low and smooth; he seemed to have decided to accept the "charity" offered him by Lawler. But there was mockery in his voice, and his eyes were alight with cunning. In the atmosphere about him was complacency which suggested that Warden knew exactly what he was doing; that he had knowledge unsuspected by Lawler, and that he had no doubt that, ultimately, Lawler would accept his offer.

"Not a steer at twenty-five," returned Lawler.

"That price means immediate shipment," pursued Warden. "The railroads are having some trouble with their rolling stock—it is hard to get cars. Some shippers are not getting them at all. And the shortage will grow."

Lawler laughed. "I don't blame you for buying as low as you can. That's business, Warden. I heard through Lew Brainard, of the Three Bar, that owners in the South Basin, over at Shotwell, were offered forty just before the round-up. I was kicking myself for making that agreement with Lefingwell at thirty. But I intended to keep my word with him. I feel mighty free, now, to sell where I can get the market price."

"Twenty-five is the market price," said Warden. "Just before the round-up there was some nervousness, it is true; and some buyers were offering forty—and they contracted for some at that price. But that was before we made—" He hesitated, reddened, and then went on quickly, plainly embarrassed, endeavoring to conceal his embarrassment by lighting a cigar.

"It was before the market broke," he went on. "The market is glutted. The West raised more cattle this season than ever before. There is no demand, and the price had to tumble. A good many cattle owners will be glad to take twenty, and even fifteen, before long."

"But if there are no cars," smiled Lawler.

Again he saw Warden's face redden.

"A shortage of cars would mean a shortage of cattle in the East, I reckon," went on Lawler. "And a shortage of cattle would mean higher prices for those that got through. But I'm not arguing—nor am I accepting twenty-five for my cattle. I reckon I'll have to ship my stock East."

"All right; I wish you luck," said Warden.

He turned his back to Lawler, bending over his desk.

Something in his voice—a hint of mock-

ery tempered with rage—brought Lawler to a pause as he crossed the threshold of the doorway. He turned and looked back at Warden, puzzled, for it seemed to him that Warden was defying him; and he seemed to feel the atmosphere of complacence that surrounded the man. His manner hinted of secret knowledge—strongly; it gave Lawler an impression of something stealthy, clandestine.

Warden's business methods were not like Lefingwell's. Lefingwell had been bluff, frank, and sincere; there was something in Warden's manner that seemed to exude craft and guile. The contrast between the two men was sharp, acute, startling; and Lawler descended the stairs feeling that he had just been in contact with something that crept instead of walking upright like a man.

A recollection of the woman he had met at the foot of the stairs came to Lawler as he descended, and thoughts of her did much to erase the impression he had gained of Warden. He grinned, thinking of how he had caught her watching him as he had mounted the stairs. And then he reddened as he realized that he would not have known she was watching him had he not turned to look back at her.

He found himself wondering about her—why she had been in Warden's office, and who could she be. And then he remembered his conversation with Blackburn, about "chapperowns," and he decided she must be that woman to whom Blackburn had referred as "a woman at Lefingwell's old place, keepin' Warden company."

He frowned, and crossed the street, going toward the railroad station building, in which he would find the freight agent.

And as he walked he was considering another contrast—that afforded by his glimpse of the strange woman and Ruth Hamlin. And presently he found himself smiling with pleasure, with a mental picture of Ruth's face before him—her clear, direct-looking, honest eyes, with no guile in them like that which had swam in the eyes that had gazed into his at the foot of the stairs.

Over in Corwin's store, where "Aunt Hannah," had gone to make some small purchases, the woman who had encountered Lawler in the hall was talking with the proprietor. Aunt Hannah was watching a clerk wrap her purchases.

"Della," she called, "do you want anything?"

"Nothing, aunty," returned the woman. Then she lowered her voice, speaking to Corwin:

"So he owns the Circle L? Is that a large ranch?"

"One of the biggest in the Wolf River section," declared Corwin.

"Then Lawler must be wealthy."

"I reckon he's got wads of dust, ma'am."

The woman's eyes glowed with satisfaction.

"Well," she said; "I was just curious about him. He is a remarkably striking looking man, isn't he?"

"You've hit it, ma'am," grinned Corwin. "I've been years tryin' to think up a word that would fit him. You've hit it. He's different. Looks like one of them statesmen with cow-puncher duds on—like a Governor or somethin', which is out of place here."

The woman smiled affirmation. "So he does," she said reflectively. "He is big, and imposing, and strikingly handsome. And he is educated, too, isn't he?"

"I reckon he is," said Corwin. "Privately, that is. His maw was a scholar of some kind back East, before she married Luke Lawler an' come out here to live with him. Luke's dead, now—died five years ago. Luke was a wolf, ma'am, with a gun. He could shoot the buttons off your coat with his eyes shut. An' he was so all-fired fast with his gun that he'd make a streak of lightnin' look like it was loafin'. Luke had a heap of man in him, ma'am, an' Kane is just as much of a man as his dad was, I reckon. Luke was—"

"About Kane Lawlor," interrupted the woman. "You say he is well educated?"

"That's about the only thing I've got ag'in' him, ma'am. I hold that no cattleman has got a right to know so durned much. It's mighty dangerous—to his folks—if he ever gets any. Now take Kane Lawler. If he was to marry a girl that wasn't educated like him, an' he'd begin to

get fool notions about hisself—why, it 'd make it pretty hard for the girl to get along with him."

He grinned. "But accordin' to what I hear, Kane ain't goin' to marry no ignoramus exactly, for he's took a shine to Ruth Hamlin, Willets's school teacher. She's got a heap of brains, that girl, an' I reckon she'd lope alongside of Kane, wherever he went."

The woman frowned. "Is Mr. Lawler going to marry Ruth Hamlin?"

Corwin looked sharply at her. "What do you suppose he's fannin' up to her for?" he demanded. "Neither of them is a heap flighty, I reckon. An' Kane will marry her if she'll have him—accordin' to the way things generally go."

The woman smiled as she left Corwin and joined the older woman at the front of the store. She smiled as she talked with the other woman, and she smiled as they both walked out of the store and climbed into a buckboard. The smile was one that would have puzzled Corwin, for it was inscrutable, baffling. Only one thing Corwin might have seen in it—determination. And that might have puzzled him, also.

CHAPTER VI.

CONVICTION.

JAY SIMMONS, the freight agent, was tilted comfortably in a chair near a window, looking out upon the railroad platform when Lawler stepped into the office. The office was on the second floor, and from a side window the agent had seen Lawler coming toward the station from Warden's office.

He had previously been sitting near the side window, but when he saw Lawler approaching the station he drew his chair to one of the front windows.

And now, apparently, he was surprised to see Lawler, for when the latter opened the door of the office Simmons exclaimed, with assumed heartiness:

"Well, if it ain't Kane Lawler!"

Simmons was a rotund man, bald, with red hair that had a faded, washed-out appearance. His eyes were large, pale blue in color, with a singularly ingratiating expression which was made almost yearning by light, colorless lashes.

Simmons's eyes, however, were unreliable as an index to his character. One could not examine very far into them. They seemed to be shallow, baffling. Simmons did not permit his eyes to betray his thoughts. He used them as masks to hide from prying eyes the things that he did not wish others to see.

"Come a visitin', Lawler?" asked Simmons as Lawler halted midway in the room and smiled faintly at the greeting he received.

"Not exactly, Simmons."

"Not exactly, eh? I reckon that means you've got some business. I'll be glad to help you out—if I can."

"I'm going to ship my beef cattle, East, Simmons, and I'm waiting cars for them—eight thousand head."

Simmons still sat in the chair beside the window. He now pursed his lips, drew his brows together, and surveyed Lawler meditatively.

"Eight thousand head, eh? Sort of whooped 'em up this season, didn't you? I reckon Gary Warden took 'em all?"

"Warden and I couldn't get together. I'm shipping them East, myself."

"Consignin' 'em to who?"

"They'll go to Legget and Mellert."

"H-m; they're an independent concern, ain't they?"

"Yes; that's the firm my father shipped to before Jim Lefingwell opened an office here."

Simmons squinted his eyes at Lawler.

"H-m," he said. Then he was silent, seemingly meditating. Then he shook his head slowly from side to side. Apparently he was gravely considering a problem and could find no solution for it.

He cleared his throat, looked at Lawler, then away from him.

"I reckon it's goin' to be a lot bothersome to ship that bunch of stock, Lawler—a heap bothersome. There's been half a dozen other owners in to see me within the last week or so, an' I couldn't give them no encouragement. There ain't an empty car in the State."

Lawler was watching him intently, and the expression in his eyes embarrassed Simmons. He flushed, cleared his throat again, and then shot a belligerent glance at Lawler.

"It ain't my fault—not a bit of it, Lawler. I've been losin' sleep over this thing—losin' sleep, I tell you! I've telegraphed every damned point on the line! This road is swept clean as a whistle. 'No cars,' they wire back to me—'no cars!' I've read that answer until there ain't no room for anything else in my brain.

"The worst of it is, I'm gettin' blamed for it. You'd think I was runnin' the damned railroad—that I was givin' orders to the president. Lem Caldwell, of the Star, over to Keegles, was in here yesterday, threatenin' to herd-ride me if I didn't have a hundred cars here this day week. He'd been to see Gary Warden—the same as you have—an' he was figgerin' on playin' her independent. An' some more owners have been in. I don't know what in hell the company is thinkin' of—no cars, an' the round-up just over."

Simmons had worked himself into a near frenzy. His face had become bloated with passion, he was breathing fast. But his eyes were shifty, and he turned them everywhere except upon Lawler.

Simmons now paused, seemingly having exhausted his breath.

"I've just left Gary Warden," said Lawler, slowly. "He offered his price for my cattle. He told me if I accepted it meant there would be no delay, that they would be shipped immediately. Warden seems to know where he can get cars."

Simmons's face reddened deeply, the flush suffusing his neck and ears. He shot one swift glance at Lawler, and then dropped his eyes. In that swift glance, however, Lawler had seen a fleeting gleam of guilt, of insincerity.

Lawler laughed shortly—a sound that made Simmons shoot another swift glance at him.

"How is it that Gary Warden figures on getting cars, Simmons?" said Lawler.

Simmons got up, his face flaming with rage.

"You're accusin' me of holdin' somethin' back, eh? You're callin' me a liar! You're thinkin' I'm—"

"Easy, there, Simmons."

There was a chill in Lawler's voice that brought Simmons rigid with a snap—as though he had suddenly been drenched with cold water. The flush left his face; he drew a deep, quick breath; then stood with open mouth, watching Lawler.

"Simmons," said the latter; "it has been my experience that whenever a man is touchy about his veracity, he will bear watching. You and Gary Warden have both flared up from the same spark. I don't know whether this thing has been framed up or not. But it looks mighty suspicious. It is the first time there has been a lack of cars after a round-up. Curiously, the lack of cars is coincident with Gary Warden's first season as a buyer of cattle.

"I don't say that you've got anything to do with it, but it's mighty plain you know something about it. I'm not asking you to tell what you know, because if there *is* a frame-up, it's a mighty big thing, and you are about as important a figure in it as a yellow coyote in a desert. I reckon that's all for you, Simmons. And you can tell your boss that Kane Lawler says he can go to hell."

He wheeled, crossed the floor, went out of the room and left the door open behind him. Simmons could hear his step on the stairs. Then Simmons sat down again, drew a big red bandanna handkerchief from a hip pocket and wiped some big beads of perspiration from his forehead.

He was breathing fast, and his face was mottled with purple spots. He got up, ran to a side window, and watched Lawler until the latter vanished behind a building on the street, opposite Gary Warden's office.

Again Simmons mopped his brow. And now he drew a breath of relief.

"Whew!" he said, aloud; "I'm glad that's over. I've been dreadin' it. He's the only one in the whole bunch that I was afraid of. An' he's wise. There 'll be hell in this section, now—pure, unadulterated hell, an' no mistake!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Little Girl Who Never Saw a Hill

by Charles Tenney Jackson

SO she built one.

If the ghost of Jim Daly, the smuggler, had come back to the attic above the little shop in the French quarter, where he died so suddenly, it would never have believed that such a mount of magic could arise from the evil spoils that he had hidden. Nor Eddie Bright, exiled to his lonely wireless station in the Caribbean, after giving up the mystery of his dishonored name; nor the other girl who waited so long for him to come back. These had all seen hills in their time, but never the loveliness in them that Carlotta dreamed after she had listened, of mornings, to the tales of old Peretti, the sailorman.

What a wonderful fellow, this Peretti, with his knotty old cane cut on the beach of some cannibal isle, and his grimy pieces of cardboard on which, with colored chalk, he would draw stiff and noble mountains like the corners of boxes; and then would sigh to the staring children of the plaza, and say he'd have to give up—he just couldn't draw mountains so they'd understand what mountains were!

But the seas he had sailed, the lands he had seen! Dusks and dawns on mountain tops peering above tropic waters! At first, just a glint of snow sparkling in the sunrise; and then, as one's good ship drew nearer, the purple gorges and green slopes spreading down to plains and rivers by the ocean. Hills were the noble things of earth; the winds swept them and the rains fell to make the lands like gardens, and their beauty lifted up the souls of men.

The old sailor, hobbling to the plaza each day, told Carlotta of them and showed his rusty sketches, thumb-marked and smelling of tobacco and the mustiness of fo'c's'le chests; and the little girl who never saw a hill tried to think of what could arise so gloriously above the flat town and the lowlands that she knew.

Higher than the roof, higher than St. Louis's cathedral spire, higher than anything one could believe! From the galleries above the longshoreman's lodgings she could see the mighty Mississippi flowing so mysteriously out of the north toward the dim blue line of the Louisiana cypress forests, and a summer cloud hanging there above the hidden Gulf made her think of the wonders which Peretti tried to describe.

And so, on the first evening when Carlotta and T' Frere discovered the hole in the brick wall from the attic above their lodgings to the attic of the house next door, and had come into the room of wonders, she dropped an armful of the lovely stuff they had found there and stood staring at it. The arc light shone through the grimed windows and touched a little peak with faint shimmerings.

The little girl clapped her hands, her eyes widened: "Come see! T' Frere—a mountain! Like the old sailor said—pretty purple things with white on top where snow is!"

The boy came to look fearsomely at the thing at her feet: "But mountains are big—Peretti said so."

"We'll make it big. Look now!" She knelt and thrust an arm under the lustrous stuff. There was the little hill at least a foot higher, pointing valiantly up to the attic dark as Fujiyama lifts to the stars on the roof of the world.

"Snow! Snow!" cried Carlotta. "Peretti said there'd be snow!"

"What's snow?" The small boy stared doubtfully. "I never saw any."

"It's white. It stays on mountains where nobody goes."

She ran back to the dusty bundles which they had torn apart under the rafters, and came now to fling a great band of silvery fabric across the ancient floor. The arc light showed floating motes through the gloom, and there, sure enough, under this murky chaos was the little hill taking form and beauty.

"And flowers—" the child breathed wonderingly. "Snow on top where nobody goes, but down where it's warm—flowers on the mountain. T' Frere—come see! There are flowers!"

He knelt by her, their noses very close to the tiny mountain.

"Gee—flowers!" he said at length. "But don't you make so much racket jumpin' up and down, or the people down-stairs 'll hear, and we never can come up here any more to play with mountains or nothin'."

"Nobody lives down-stairs since Mr. Daly died in his shop."

"The police 'll come and find all this, and then they won't be no mountain. And it's so dark you can't hardly see the flowers."

"We'll build it big—by the window. If the sun shines on it, it 'll shine. The sun shines on mountains. Peretti said so."

"We'll get these old chairs and boxes and pile 'em. We'll build 'at ol' mountain up higher 'n the sky, Carlotta. We'll—"

"Keep still," she warned. "Don't ever tell any of the kids we been up here. Don't you ever tell anybody. Remember, T' Frere!"

And they went through the hole over the jagged bricks, and then down the ladder to their own lodgings. Louis Labat, the long-shoreman, was snoring, and did not hear the whispering of his two motherless children as they crept to bed and covered their ears against the sting of the Texas norther that swayed the creaking palms out in the plaza of the bronze general.

The bronze general on the green horse was always peering to the west, as if he, too, might be looking for mountains over the flat roofs of New Orleans; and Carlotta, who played through the wide, stone-flagged alley of Père Antoine and about the plaza where she pleased, often wondered why Mr. Peretti—surely a greater man, with his cane from the cannibal isle and his sketches of hills, done in pink and purple crayons—did not have a monument with a horse and a cocked hat so that the tourists in the motor buses would stop and look and listen.

And the other girl—the tall girl who lived behind the latticed gallery on the floor above Mme. Torchi's shop, where they sold little plaster saints and angels—Carlotta wondered at her, too; for once she stopped by Mr. Peretti, who was sunning himself on a bench, and asked:

"The Arabella docked last night; and didn't the mate—did he say he'd asked down there in Trinidad, or Port o' Spain, as he said he would, for word of—Eddie?"

The old sailor rubbed his nose doubtfully. "I—miss—I limped down there soon as that ol' windjammer tied up, and asked em. I asked 'em all, miss—and the mate said jes' once, when they was loadin' asphalt, some lad saw him shippin' out for the Wind'ard Islands. It was two years ago, and—"

"Oh, tell him to come back!" the girl cried. "In any port—on any ship—have them tell him to come back! Tell him I waited—that I'll wait as long as the hills last and the rivers run to the sea!"

Then the tall girl went on, leaving the little girl staring after.

Old Peretti was shaking his head. That was a long time to wait, with the mighty Mississippi pouring its floods down from the mountains of all America to flow eternally to the sea. But the old man thought of another eternal thing, and that was love in a human heart.

Carlotta looked after the tall girl again curiously: "Mr. Peretti! She's just like a mountain, ain't she?"

"Hey—what?"

"Pretty," said the child slowly. "And say, can a little hill grow up to be a mountain?"

"Hey? Oh—h-m! I guess so!"

The old sailorman-artist looked after the tall girl, too. Once he had shyly wanted to ask if he might not try to sketch her face—but he knew he couldn't. Beauty was not for him and his clumsy pencil. He could only draw angular mountains to please the little girl that played in the plaza. But he knew why the other girl lived down here by the wharves, and why she lingered about the park, when a ship came up from the south ports past Yucatan, trying to learn things from the customs men and officers.

It was the smaller ships that the girl haunted—obscure old tubs dug out of mud banks to sail again; dirty vagrants, bringers of copra and rich woods, manned by motley crews out of the Caribbean isles. The old man knew, and sighed:

"She goes to meet the ships, and he never comes back no more." Then he chuckled to the longshoreman's child: "Hey, if I didn't have a crick in my back I'd put to sea and find 'im!"

The next evening Carlotta stood before three battered chairs piled one upon the other, over which she had heaped a wondrous pyramid.

"Pile up the big box first, and the chairs on that—and then le' me climb up and put on snow!" cried her brother vigorously.

"All right! But don't step on the flowers, T' Frere!"

And they fell to work again, bringing bales and boxes and litter of the loft, and then robing the rough outlines about with loveliness. The little hill was growing nobly up to be a mountain!

In the last light Carlotta knelt to caress its soft slopes, to put her eyes down close to discover the flowers. For flowers there were—gorgeous roses, delicate *fleur-de-lis*, faint wreathings of violets, but all in the half-dark. But Peretti had said that hills loved sunshine, and that the lordliest mountain could shelter the tiniest flower.

"Somebody 'll have to get the window open so's to make sunshine," mused Carlotta. And then she gave a sudden cry of delight.

For over the slate roofs of the French Quarter and through the grimed windows had come a great beam of light—and there her hill stood with a snowy peak! The bright ray, blinding them for an instant, vanished, leaving the hill softly shimmering in the arc glow, while down in the crescent bend of the Mississippi came the siren of a steamship warping to its dock. And the search-light did not come again to the loft of the secret mountain.

"But did you see?" Carlotta cried. "Snow and everything! We got to have somebody big and tall to make sunshine! And flowers, T' Frere—do you know where we saw flowers once like these?"

"In Torchi's shop, where they sell the little saints in Lent—"

"No, no! Those were paper flowers! No—it was at the opera, when we stood in Bourbon Street and watched beautiful ladies get out of automobiles. Look here—dressed just like me!"

And she caught up a corner of a field of pale gold and drew it about her shoulders. "Looky! That's the way they go to the opera!"

"Gee!" he murmured. "You're pretty as a mountain!"

Carlotta drew the folds closer at this first compliment of her life. She started to walk importantly down the room, and the boy howled: "Hold on! You're upsettin' the mountain!"

It was true. The boxes and broken chairs heaved and fell with a crash. T' Frere rushed to the wreck, disconsolate.

"Now, see what you gone and done! Upset a mountain!"

And he fell to work like Thor at the foundations of the world, trying to rebuild

from chaos. But the little girl drew the silken field of tiny flowers closer about her shoulders and peered curiously at her reflection in the dirty window.

It was not the first beautiful cosmos that had been wrecked by the vanity of a woman.

Peretti, the old sailor with a crick in his back and the cane from the cannibal isle, was on his seat in the ancient Place d'Armes when the girl who lived above the shop in the Cathedral alley came by and stopped. She was watching a weather-worn old bark toil up the Mississippi with a tug pouring soot through its rigging, and Peretti knew she would ask about the strange ship. But first she sat down and watched Mr. Peretti fumbling for the green chalk in his pocket with which he was going to rub a little mountain on his board until it was the biggest of three. The old sailorman winked foolishly.

"I jes' draws 'em for the kids, miss. That little Labat kid she likes 'em pink and purple mostly, with green and yaller at the bottom. Miss, I seen 'em that way, too. 'Way off yander in the Arafura Sea, and Australey and them places."

"Maybe, Mr. Peretti, he has gone there?"

"Oh, no—miss! He—wouldn't go so far! He thought Daly 'd confess some time to the customs officers; but then Daly died and didn't."

"And Eddie swore he'd never come back if they didn't get Daly."

"Jes' a hot-head boy, Eddie Bright was, and when he served his time for Daly's job, he couldn't face you again—because he loved you, miss. He told me so when he took ship and disappeared."

"I know," she said, and then was still. The old man stole a glance at her. He knew she did not see the red, ornate old buildings beyond the plaza palms; she was dreaming of the far places, the unknown ports, the nameless trails; and she would love any spot in all the world where he had rested for the night.

But after a while she spoke in a changed voice and pointed at the old brick building which was boarded up below where there had been a shop since the days of Lafitte, the pirate, and the Spanish viceroys. The tenement dwellers on either side said that it belonged to a baroness who had died in France. At least a funny old Creole avocat came to look at it now and then, fumbled some yellow papers, and mumbled something about selling the estate, and then went away.

Nobody knew, and nobody cared. That is the way things go—great ladies, old sailormen, brick blocks, and dreams. They get old and tumble down unnoticed—everything except mountains.

And the other thing that Mr. Peretti saw in the girl's eyes—that, too, was enduring as the hills.

"Those children are trying to wash the attic windows," she went on. "I saw them this morning, and there they are now."

Mr. Peretti couldn't see that far. The salt spume of the seven seas had bleared his sight, or else he had looked upon too many hills when they were pink. But he laughed with bashful assurance.

"Hey, yes! All a-time askin' me things—all a-time! Askin' me, can a mountain grow up, and wot's behind 'em when you git there!"

She gave him a smile that made him wish he was an artist and not an old sailor with a crick in his back. "And they told me they built a mountain 'at's got flowers but ain't no sunshine, and they want somebody tall to make the sunshine. Wot do you think o' that?"

But the girl went on to watch the men from the ships who passed from the river wharves through the plaza. And that night, when she had gone back to her lonely room, she stood by the windows, for a steamship's siren had sounded in the river crescent, and now a great search-light played down from the sky.

"A ship?" she whispered. "Oh, why won't he come back? He paid the price—he served his time! Served it for Daly, who never spoke! Oh, bring him back! Dear God—bring him back to me!"

The search-light was on the creaking palm tops now; then it wavered across the high staring windows across the square. They seemed curiously clean, and now she

saw against the glass a child's form robed in white. The great ray was inexorable in its searching there. The loft was filled with silvery light; dusty beams and boxes, walls, and cobwebbed corners; but before them a strange misshapen object—a tower, a pyramid, perhaps—that gleamed darkly, even as the child's form shimmered with radiance.

The girl gasped at the apparition. Then the search-light vanished to the sky; she was staring at blank, dreary windows where presently a little candle shone and moved.

"What was that? What are they doing there?" she whispered.

And the next morning, when she came upon Carlotta Labat and Mr. Peretti in the square, she looked sharply at the child who never saw a hill. She was reproving Mr. Peretti because he had spilled some hot pipe ashes on a purple mountain. Men are so careless about some things, and yet it's hard to ruin a good mountain.

The tall girl was going to ask Carlotta a wondering question, but the child seized Mr. Peretti's mountain and ran off home and up the stairs and the ladder to the trap-door to the lodgings' attic. Papa Louis was away all day, and snored all night—a perfectly fine papa, who never interfered, and even helped wash dishes at night.

Carlotta climbed through the hole in the brick wall to the attic next door.

"T' Frere, he gave us another mountain—a purple one with a tobacco hole burned in it!"

"Aw, we don't care about Peretti's ol' mountains! I been tryin' to pry open the winder! It's all rusty, and there's wasps in it."

And they heaved and heaved again against the frames of the heavy French windows whose immense drop-bolts were forged, doubtless in the slave-smithy that Jean Lafitte had maintained a century ago around the corner, and then gave it up. It would take a strong man to make the sunshine.

The little girl stood ankle-deep in stuff that no vain queen would have flung about unheeded. Dragged from a slit bale was a breadth of azure silk, and with this in her hands she looked up at the dirty rafters.

"If we had a ladder and some tacks," she went on, "we could make sky."

"A feller can't do everything. I built a river around the mountain, and a cave for robbers. You got to play you was a princess, and robbers chased you around the mountain. You got silk enough for forty princesses."

"T' Frere!" she cried joyously. "We're the richest people in the world! But somebody's got to make sunshine!"

It was true. The loft was a darkly coruscating cavern. From wall to wall it was carpeted with silks, but in the shadows it was hard to distinguish a sapphire castle from a robber's roost of garnet; and a river of tangerine is much like a cornflower meadow. Yes, a practical handy Olympian god with a stepladder could assist a lot. He might even put up a starry firmament to cover the cobwebbed rafters.

But the magic makers stood in a world of softly darkling colors.

"There's lots and lots, but we can't hang up any more," mused Carlotta. "And when it's all done we can play. But there must be sunshine; if you were only big enough, T' Frere, to open the windows."

"We could get Mr. Peretti, but he couldn't climb that ladder."

"No. And maybe he'd laugh. And other people 'd want to tear it down and sell it to the stores where they only give you such a little bit for a dollar."

She thought of all the people she knew, but there are so few with whom one can trust a mountain. Even the philosophers will persist in tinkering with the universe, when—as every one should know—a good mountain cannot be improved upon; nor stars, nor the sea; or sunshine, or a child's dream, or anything worth while.

So the girl who had never seen a hill went out in the plaza looking curiously at the people, wondering if any one of them was good at keeping secrets. She trusted sailors more than other people because of Mr. Peretti, who loved mountains.

She had gone around the bronze general in the middle of the plaza before she discovered Mr. Peretti. He was not on his accustomed bench, but coming along the walk from the French market, and with him

was another man. This was a sailor indeed, with a kit-bag and his coat collar upturned, and he was listening to the older man with an incredulous face.

Carlotta Labat had never seen Mr. Peretti so excited, standing so straight, shaking his cannibal cane, and dropping from his package of sketch-board under his other arm a mountain or two without noticing them. She came and looked up at them curiously.

"Why didn't you ever think, man—why didn't you ever believe?"

"I didn't want to see her, Peretti. When I did my time I just wanted to get away. I wouldn't have been here now if the Jeanette hadn't taken us off Swan Island, after the wireless was wrecked in the hurricane, and dumped us here in port. I tell you, man, I never wanted to see this town again."

"But she—waited for you, Eddie—five years now."

The bronzed young man was silent. He stuck a big finger in the bowl of his pipe and looked down at the little girl who stared at him.

"Five years—at Atlanta—on Daly's evidence. It was Daly's gang that got the stuff out of the warehouse when I was customs inspector; and then they swore the job off on me. Five years old man, and three in the islands—"

He stopped and looked off over the gray roofs of the town as if visualizing again the loneliness.

"Why didn't you come back to her?" the old man demanded. "What did she care for all that?"

"I didn't know—I didn't believe—she'd wait, or care—"

"Oh, you don't know 'em! She never believed the gove'ment's case. She waited, and waited—jes' like the hills, she said—eternal."

The old sailorman looked queerly upon the other's obstinate chin and silent lips. "You wait, now," he muttered. "It's your turn to wait, Eddie Bright!"

Mr. Peretti arose stiffly and shuffled off across the grass, careless as ever, dropping a mountain from under his arm. And, seeing this, Carlotta dashed after him. She came back to the stranger, who took no notice of her, seeming so lonely and so disturbed, until she placed the Peretti mountain upon his knee.

"Did you ever see one yellow—like that?"

"Eh?" He looked up, puzzled at the child's question.

"Do you like mountains?"

"Mountains? Oh, I'd like to see 'em! I'm going to ship out of here again! I'm going to get so far away that no one can ever say I was the man that did crooked work for Jim Daly! I'm going!"

He uprose in some rough bitterness, but suddenly the child grasped his sleeve.

"Going away? And never come back no more?"

"Never come back any more! She wouldn't want me—old Peretti's crazy! She wouldn't wait—she couldn't wait, that long!"

"Come on!" the child cried. "You can open the windows and make sunshine!"

"Eh—what?"

"It 'll just take a minute. Then you go away and never tell anybody and never come back no more!"

He stared wonderingly at her, and then with an uncertain laugh followed her tugging hand in his. When they went through the arched stone court of the ancient tenement and up the stairs, he paused at the foot of the ladder.

"Come on! It's all right. You got to make sunshine, though!"

He followed the adventurer upward. There was a red murky light struggling through grimed windows when he had squeezed through the hole in the brick wall, but the stranger had not gone a yard before his meet tangled in some crinkly stuff that carpeted the floor.

He kicked it off and went to the window past a strange object that seemed swathes and sashes of cloth higher than his head. And seeing this he stopped and was still a long time staring at it.

"The old windows," said the child. "Open 'em for us. Then you'll see!"

But the young man cried out suddenly: "The silks! Say—are you Jim Daly's kid?"

"No. Daly's been dead a long time. Now, open the windows—"

"Kid! Tell me! Where did you get this stuff?"

"We found it here. We tore it out of the boxes and built a hill like Peretti said—"

"Daly!" he cried. And then he did dash to the windows, and his big shoulder heaved against the frame in a fury that astonished her. Again, and then with a crash of glass and rending wood the high window under the gable tottered and went out and downward.

The child stood terrified.

"Now you done it! The police 'll come, and—"

The late afternoon sunshine was pouring in a long, wide gap that was filled with dusty motes. Carlotta cried out in rapture, for there, as if by new magic, the silken hill stood forth with a snowy peak and slopes of flowers streaming to the floor.

"The Turrialba's silk," the stranger muttered grimly. "Daly hid the stuff here —and died."

Carlotta had gone to the window and was staring down.

"You better get out," she warned, "you done it now! People are lookin' at the window. There's Mr. Peretti in the square and that girl who's all the time lookin' and lookin'. You better run!"

And suddenly the young man who could make sunshine did so. He whirled with a strange laugh, out through the hole in the wall and down the loft ladder to the Labat lodging floor. Carlotta followed slowly and with some regret. If the sunshine maker had not created all that racket with the window he could have remained and put up the sky. Sky would have kept the mountain from getting so dusty.

Carlotta was trying to adjust the ladder where this sailor, who seemed so upset at sight of a mountain, had displaced it, when she saw him coming back. He was greatly excited, and shouted and laughed to some one behind.

"Why, the tall girl who lives above the plaster-angel shop," she murmured in surprise. "Pretty like a mountain, and knows Mr. Peretti!"

When Eddie Bright's head came above the floor into the loft he was surprised to find Carlotta's there, staring expectantly at him.

He held a flash-light upon her, and she blinked and then said:

"Give me that! It's just what we needed before!"

"All right! You show the way!"

Then the young man who made sunshine turned to help the other girl through the narrow cleft in the old brick wall to the room of the secret mountain.

"It's here, I tell you, Helen! The forty thousand dollars' worth of silks that Daly got away with from the Turrialba, and they swore I was crooked in the customs service and let the gang do it. Daly's stuff —oh, come and look what the kids did with it!"

"A mountain," explained the child, because they were still.

The tall girl was crying softly, and Carlotta turned the flash-light on them both. No, she was laughing—in his arms. It was queer the effect that mountains have on some people, she thought.

"Looky," she went on. "This side, where it's dark, the robbers live, and bears come out of the woods. But on the other side, where it's prettiest, princesses live and climb the hill to see everything beautiful."

The other girl, with the arm of the sunshine maker around her, stood in silent wonder again. The young man also was looking about as if he was trying to comprehend it all, this cave of the jinn which they had made.

As high on the rough walls as children could reach, the stuff was tacked and spread over boxes and ancient chairs; everywhere, flung and unrolled, fabrics that the queens of the ages would have envied. Levantine merchants, beautiful women of Byzantium, priests and warriors of mediæval pageants would have loved the clothes that were scattered under the feet of the longshoreman's children. Wondrous velvets like unto those for which Genoese sailors braved the seas to Cathay; damasks of Sicily, silken rugs from Oriental garden walls, lovely tapestries of Anjou, robes of

the princes of Bagdad—as beautiful as these were the hangings of the place of the secret mountain.

And over that pyramid itself, in the middle of the room, they had hurled bolts and fragments with the extravagance of young barbarians; they had crowned the peak with a snowy satin, and down the slopes had splashed rivers of turquoise that led through lands of coral and about isles of amethyst and heliotrope and gold.

The child stood holding the wavering flash-light upon her dream.

"Now you'll tell and spoil it all," she said slowly.

The other girl came to kneel by her and draw her close.

"Oh, my dear, if you could know!" she whispered. "We've climbed a mountain so long—in darkness! Now, the light at the top, just as you wanted! And light for him—clearing everything!"

The child heard soft rustlings in the dusk as the young man who could make sunshine moved nearer.

"Looky! Where you stand we put the prettiest flowers of all!"

"Yes!" cried the young man joyously. "I remember this very piece, Helen! The costliest brocade in the world—from Luristan!"

"A road for princesses and people to go up the mountain," added Carlotta earnestly. "See, you can climb all the way to the top on it!"

And she held the light as a lamp to the feet of the lovers.

"Like a garden of Persian roses," whispered the other girl joyfully; "all about our path!"

SHE AND HE

OH, the books that I read yesterday held plaintive, maiden fear;
"Deserted Wife," "Alone, Unloved," "Her Last, Heart-broken tear!"
While those by a Mrs. Sheldon, ("He Loves Me for Myself")
Prove t'was the male who ran the world, female who graced the shelf.
Yes—then t'was he who swung the earth, he who acted awful gay,
He, who loved, or let alone, but—*that was yesterday!*

True, the books that I read long ago, ("With Pain He Filled Her Days,"
"Why Did He Wed Her?" "Unloved Wife," and "Harold's Taking Ways")
Showed in the men more swagger and maids who tried to please.
And did they speak in public then? Why, they didn't dare to sneeze!
Oh, she did all the pleasing then. At home she really longed to stay.
Her one small aim to murmur "Yes," but—*that was yesterday!*

"At Last He Loved," "Her Victory!" (this over a single life)
"She Loved Him Long," "His Sinful Quest," "Was She Widow or Wife?"—
Ah, turn from these to modern days and "Second Blooming" stuff;
Now men are weak, now maids are strong and—*my they cut up rough!*
True, then t'was he who started it; he who came, or went away;
He who woed, or didn't woo, but—*that was yesterday!*

We've "Martie, the Unconquered," and "A Bed of Roses," too,
Which shows how female purpose from the worst may glean a few.
"Emma McChesney" rules the road, "Elizabeth's Campaign"
Reveals domestic dominance in stealthy, woman gain.
Once—once t'was she who stayed at home, content, in housework making hay;
Warmed his slippers, got his meals, but—*that was yesterday!*

The books I read in years gone by reeked with the sobbing maid.
The men did all the troubling then. She trembled, was afraid.
But now the tales of her wild oats and strength fill all the space,
So—gentlemen, to languishing with all your utmost grace!
For—now 'tis she who stays out late, reckless she, who turns him gray;
Yes, she who rudely breaks all vows, she hits it up to-day!

Katharine Haviland Taylor.

Whispering Rock

by Maxwell Smith

Author of "Not Under Control," "On the Face of It," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

PROLOGUE

You can hear the harassed and restless dead wailing round the Rock—the natives will tell you so, and bid you listen. You laugh, and say it is the wind. They turn their faces to every point, and watch a feather fall straight down; then ask you: where's the wind? A freak, you say; a queer current that whistles up out of the gorge.

All right. But how about the pines? Hear them—the rustling of shrouds. You shrug—the wind; they catch you up quickly, reminding that there is no wind.

And why this knot of pines about the Rock, with not another pine in sight for miles? Can't you see that the pines are here because this is a sighing place of the damned?

Aren't the pines themselves condemned under sentence of everlasting wakefulness and weariness, never allowed to bend their backs in rest, but only to suffer the more when the tempest assails them—condemned to stand straight and ever green because they betrayed the Son of Man to the Pharisees? Hark to the rustle of the shrouds among them, fit dwelling-place for ghosts!

A fantasy, you say, born of the imagination of those who live in the silences of the hills. Yet—you listen! They smile triumphantly, the natives, as you stand still and thoughtful while that eery *whish-ew!* comes from about the Rock, and the pines go *shrrrsh! shrrrsh! shrrrsh!*

There—they point down the sheer face of the Rock to the creek—mark that groaning, and the turmoil of torment and pain. Why should the waters grow turgid here, when for every other foot of its course the stream moves placidly? That, too, in a countryside where the normal stream goes tumbling and smashing constantly over fall and rapid; where a calm flow is seldom seen. Look at it, writhing and grumbling, racking them in eternal hurt, keeping them sleepless and suffering!

With moonlight you would understand better. Then watch the shifting beams—the twisting shadows. Pay heed to that wilder moaning from the rock; the shriller sound of the turgent waters. It's when the moon is brightest that they strive most to break their bonds, these souls, and attain peace. Observe that blotch of darkness cast by the Rock—on the side that the moon should light—and stand in it among the Voices!

And the cold. Even on a summer day it is chill at the Rock. Never is it warm beside those sentinel pines. How could a place of haunts hold aught but the atmosphere of the tomb? Come some time on a blazing day, and see for yourself.

But rather come on a moonlight night, for then the Voices are raised to their loudest—the Voices round the Rock and in the snapping white of the leaping waters; and the *shrrrsh!* of the garments of the dead that weave among the pines. Through it all, then, you will hear Her voice as She cries for Their salvation.

Down there, close under the rock, they found her body. That's why her name and those of her mother and her father are chiseled on the living monument.

Also, that is why that graven panel, with its biting, hideous scroll, is on the Rock beneath their names—the panel with the brazen numerals spelled out, one below another—*One! Two! Three! Four! Five!* And there is space—you gage it as the picture grips you—space for—for five more livid, cruel-carved lines.

There never will be more than that upon the Rock. The enumeration never will be completed. There was a sixth that would have been set down, but it is missing; the space made ready for it must remain blank with the others, because the hand that was turned to this record of hate has been stilled, and two other hands joined.

But—and now you shiver a little, especially if the moon be full, as you read the message on the Rock and harken to what the natives tell you—surely the toll already there is sufficient to make this an abode of the peaceless damned!

The clammy cold is more pronounced as you contemplate the relentless numerals. You brush from your eyes the vision of those that are not there—each representing a life; for a life for her every finger was his measure—and you start at the realization that they are not there only because death took her father before his task was done.

Whereat the folk of the hills—who ordinarily avoid the Rock—notice your hush; and, watching you from the corners of their eyes, they nod to themselves—and whisper. Their tones always sink, and they draw nearer when they tell you this: That sometimes the wraiths of the five who are numbered within the panel assemble on the summit of the Rock and raise pitiful hands to heaven, their moanings mingling in the miserable, whining cadences of a purgatory.

The sixth, too, perhaps, whose number is not recorded—through the taking of whose life came about the end of the vengeance—though none will swear that he is actually in that ghostly company.

Of the five there is no mistake. They gather in their torment, while above them floats the spirit of Jacqueline, her arms flung like theirs to heaven as she pleads for their forgiveness. Her mother appears to hover, helpless, in her anguish. And her father—who reaches to pull down the hands of Jacqueline that are clasped in prayer!

Then, you will learn, there comes a great commotion in the pine tops: a doubling in volume of that wailing about the Rock; the bustling water throws itself higher from its jagged bed, to fall with grown fury and chattering.

Till suddenly from out the pines there is a frozen blast—and the five—maybe six—upon the Rock are gone! The specter of her mother fades; and that of her father. The girl is alone in her hopeless supplication!

CHAPTER I.

THE ROCK.

JACQUELINE skipped down the car steps, her fingers barely skimming the hand of the conductor extended to aid her. He smiled on her, as every one smiled on Jacqueline, and contrasted her with Dorothy, her companion, who took his hand solidly as she descended.

"Looks good to you, Jack?" Everybody called her Jack as everybody looked with envious approval on her lithe figure that bubbled with the life in her. He fol-

lowed her gaze over the wooded country as he spoke.

Jacqueline stretched her arms and took another full breath of the crisp mountain air. She turned to him her flushed face with the laughing eyes now reflecting something deeper—

"You bet!" From her it wasn't slangy, for nowhere in her was there a discord. In another girl such an abundance of energy, of light-hearted abandon, might have been tomboyish; but not in Jacqueline. She picked up her own hand-bag, and Dorothy's; she had a way like that of mothering Dorothy who in her setting against Jacqueline seemed all the more timid.

"You bet!" she laughed again. "If I didn't get back to my hills often enough, I— I'd die!"

Motioning to the engineer to go ahead, the conductor looked about the narrow platform and beyond into the hamlet street.

"No one to meet you, Jack?" he queried as he swung aboard.

She shook her head.

"No. We came a day ahead—to surprise them." She laid down a bag to wave to him. "We're going to walk. By-by. You can take us back next week."

Her glance caressingly on the hills she loved, the girl stood until the laboring train, with its ancient locomotive puffing furiously on the upgrade, had wound round a mountain shoulder. The diminishing sound of the rattling rods and escaping steam aroused her. With a sigh she came out of her reverie.

"Come, Dot. It'll take us an hour to walk it."

She stepped out but her chum halted her.

"It's late, Jack." Dorothy regarded the cloudy sky apprehensively. "It'll soon be dark. Hadn't we better get some one to drive us over?"

Jacqueline shrugged with a suggestion of impatience—Dot's timidity was annoying at times. What though it did become dark before they reached home? She had been looking forward to this walk since she and Dot had left school in Boston for the Thanksgiving holiday. She wanted to revel in the quiet, to swing along through the woods, and know again the solitude of *her* hills. They always were her own hills, to Jacqueline.

"We shouldn't have come without sending word," insisted Dorothy. "Let's telephone, and—"

"We'll walk," said Jacqueline and while she smiled her jaw set so that her companion knew the matter was decided.

"It's going to storm," said Dot in final protest.

Jacqueline looked at the lowering sky and nodded emphatically—

"I hope it does," she declared, and laughed. "The sheltered life is all right, but it does get a little monotonous. I'd like to lean against a good old-fashioned storm. Hope it pours."

Together they made off down the road, Jacqueline tingling to step out with long, free stride, but forced to regulate her pace to that of her smaller, less robust chum.

Their homes were two miles away. They should arrive about dinner time, and she had a pleasurable anticipation of her greeting—a mixture of scolding for not having had her father meet her, and of surprised joy over her arrival a day earlier, which meant that she would be twenty-four hours more with them.

With that thought her gaze turned to Dorothy. She wondered whether Dot's homecoming would be as happy. If Dot's father was there, she doubted it. She hoped he would not—he seldom was home, and, like every one else, Jacqueline knew vaguely that there was something mysterious about his comings and goings.

"Your dad home, Dot?" she asked casually. They didn't often refer to Lonsdale as they did to Jacqueline's father. Since they had grown older—in the last couple of years since they were fourteen or thereabout, they had realized that there was reason for the shadow that seemed to hang over the Lonsdale home.

Something of the somberness that was perpetually in the features of her mother came to Dorothy. She bit her lip at this apparent reading of her thought.

"I don't know—mother didn't say."

Jacqueline hastened to lift the other girl's depression.

"You'll stop over at our place as much as you can, won't you? You and your mother will spend Thanksgiving day there. And—and your father," she added hastily, "if he's home."

That shrinking that had been growing upon the other girl, which was almost habitual with her mother, as though she feared a blow, became more pronounced. She forced a smile—

"I guess so," she said. "Of course—we'll be glad to."

Atop a hill Jaqueline stopped to dwell enthusiastically on the rolling panorama in which, bleak as it was with the trees bare and cold, she found the rugged beauty.

"There," she pointed ahead of them where the road dipped a quarter of a mile away—that's the Rock. We're going to picnic there, Dot, before we go back to school, whether it rains, hails, or snows. Rex wrote me the other day that he was over and fixed up the fireplace so everything would be shipshape for us."

Rex was her thirteen-year-old brother, the only other child.

"And there's a big trout down in the pool below that he's been saving for me—for us," she ran on. Her eyes lighted as they resumed walking. "Say—let's go down and see if we can get a look at him—Rex says he's a trout among trout."

Dorothy negatived the proposal.

"It would take half an hour to climb down to the pool and up again," she objected. "And," she laughed faintly, for her heart wasn't in it, "you know how you'd be, Jack. You'd stay looking for that fish until it was too dark to see. Let's go straight on," she was almost pleading. "I want to get home to—to—" She wanted to get home to learn whether her father was there, but she could not say it.

Jacqueline understood the unspoken words.

"All right, Dot," she agreed. "We won't stop. That is," she amended, "we won't go down to the pool. We'll go over to the Rock a minute—just for a minute."

Dorothy didn't argue—she couldn't be constantly a wet blanket.

"Just for a minute, Jack. We'll have lots of time in the week before we go back to school."

They reached the point where the Rock stands fifty yards off the road. Jacqueline leading the way, they went over the path to it through the trees.

On two sides the Rock, an odd, square-topped formation, rises straight up to its height of twenty feet. On another it sinks sheer for seventy feet into the chasm where the stream now snarls and whips itself to foam. The fourth side is a broken slope allowing already foothold for one to clamber to the summit.

Dropping their hand-bags at the base of the crag, Jacqueline started up it.

"Come on, Dot," she urged. "We'll peek at where that trout is waiting."

She was half-way to the top, and Dorothy followed. Together they inspected the fireplace they had helped to build years ago, and which Jacqueline's brother had repaired in preparation for their homecoming. Then they looked down the seventy-foot face of the rock—Jacqueline standing fearlessly with one foot on the edge, Dorothy keeping as far back as possible, and craning her neck to see the pool that held the prize Rex had promised them.

"Be careful, Jack — please." Dorothy shuffled backward another few inches. "You might—fall."

Jacqueline stretched her arms out over the gorge and laughed with head thrown up, her body straight and tall.

"Fall!" she was saying scornfully when a scrunching on the rock behind warned her to turn.

A whiskered face under a shapeless hat was regarding them from the place at which they had ascended. Even in the dim light Jacqueline could see the dirty eyes appraising herself and Dorothy in turn. Only the head and shoulders of the man were showing, but that sufficed to present a complete picture of him. His grimy paws came into sight as he hauled himself deliberately upward.

While they stood motionless, Jacqueline still on the verge of the chasm, Dorothy reaching out a hand to her for courage, he greeted them.

"Howdy, girls?" The dead cigar stub

shifted from one corner of his mouth to the other. His lips protruded in a leer. He came a step nearer, his gaze focusing on the sparkle of diamonds in a lavaliere showing where Jacqueline's coat collar lay open.

"Jack!" Dot's terrified whisper awakened Jacqueline to a sense of their perilous position on the cliff edge. She took Dorothy by the arm and moved her away from that danger. The man, however, barred the only road of descent.

In her terror Dorothy precipitated the situation. She made a rush to get past him. His hand closed on her arm, and, chuckling, he drew her to him. While she strained at arm's-length his fingers on her gloved hand found the outline of a ring.

Laughing at her ineffectual effort to free herself, he was ripping off her glove when Jacqueline advanced swiftly and struck him on the face.

His grip relaxing in the surprise of attack, Dot wrenched herself free. With a curse he turned and clutched at Jacqueline.

"Run, Dot—run!" she cried, and struck the man again.

Dumb with fear, Dorothy ran. If in her panic she thought of Jacqueline at all as she stumbled down from the summit of the rock, it was to suppose that she was following. Jacqueline was so strong, so self-reliant, so brave. She would not have said to run had she not been sure herself of eluding the man.

Half-way down the path to the road, the fleeing girl fell. In arising she looked back. The power went from her legs, and on hands and knees she remained watching the scene upon the rock.

CHAPTER II.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE ROCK.

HIS arms outspread, the tramp stood considering Jacqueline, ready to intercept her should she attempt to run past him. The first flush of anger over the blows she had landed on his grimy, bewhiskered face gave way to amusement. He stuck his tongue in the corner of his mouth, shoving his lower lip out repulsively, a dribble of tobacco juice spilling over it.

When he had approached the two girls he had not been quite certain of what he intended to do. The trinket at Jacqueline's neck had suggested robbery, but a natural, cringing fear of the law might have restrained him from that but for the action of Dorothy, which had compelled him to lay violent hands on her.

Having gone so far, he felt that he might as well go the limit. He would be hunted on an assault charge, anyway. He might as well get something out of the encounter; for, even with no more against him than the count now stood, a judge would handle him severely as a lesson to his fellows. Since he was facing arrest he had little more to lose by aggravating his offense.

"Gimme that thing on your neck," he demanded.

Jacqueline eyed him calmly, but her heart beat fast. The spot was desolate, without human habitation nearer than a mile, except across rough country, and there was little traffic on the nearby road.

But she did not believe that he would harm her. He must realize that Dot already was running for help, that the alarm quickly would be out for him.

She glanced toward the pathway to the road, and her heart skipped a beat as she saw Dorothy crouching there on all fours, paralyzed with fright.

Without answering the man, she called to her chum:

"Run, Dorothy—run to—" she forced an air of confidence into her tone— "to Beiter's house."

She tried to speak as though Beiter's house was only a step away.

The tramp also looked at the other girl, and he leered as she remained motionless.

"Your pal ain't got the guts you got, girlie," he mouthed. "Gimme that thing on yer neck an' y'can run along."

He moved a pace nearer. Six feet away Jacqueline backed up, maintaining the distance between them.

Hands clenched at her sides, she faced him defiantly. The threatened contact with such a creature awoke loathing within her. A great horse-blanket pin that held

the upturned collar of his ragged coat tight about his throat, caught her gaze. It was suggestive, in some way, of the bestiality of his whole presence.

Her eye traveled over him to the bits of sacking tied about the lower parts of his legs, over his trousers, like leggings. She had seen tramps often enough, but never had she had anything but a feeling of pity for them—until now. This closer association with the breed, and the menace that it carried, was different. She still clung to the thought that the man would not actually injure her.

Her chin firm, she took a tentative step. She ignored his demand for the lavaliere.

"Get out of my way," she said sharply.

He took the cigar butt from his mouth, and rolled the soggy mess between thumb and forefinger.

"The jewelry," he nodded. From the tail of his eye he marked Dorothy. He could not waste too much time. She might recover her nerve at any minute, and speed for aid. "The jewelry, an' y'can go."

Again he advanced. Jacqueline stopped. She could not permit him to touch her. She retreated slowly as he came on.

"Look out," he said suddenly, halting. "Y're gettin' near the edge, girly—you'll fall over."

That would be going too far—to drive her off the rock. The side to which she had withdrawn before him was only a twenty-foot drop, but even that might kill her. He didn't want a murder charge against him.

Startled by the nearness of this added danger, Jacqueline glanced over her shoulder. Another step and she would have been over the edge and tumbling to serious injury at least.

It was then that the closeness of the corner in which she was impressed her. The determination of the man crowded its way into her understanding. She saw that if she were to escape she must fight.

She gaged his bulk. He was not much taller than she, but he was probably fifty pounds heavier. Once she got into his grip she would have little chance, but if she could evade him she could outrun him.

Anxiously she looked again to see whether Dorothy had gone. Dorothy had not moved, and with an impatient motion Jacqueline concluded to press matters to an end.

She gathered herself for a shifty jump she had learned at basketball. To the right she had a space of fifteen feet or so. To the left there was only a few feet between her and the chasm. She was tensing to throw herself to the right, then swing in the opposite direction, as the tramp sprang to meet her feint.

Craftily he guessed what was in her mind.

"Look out, girly," he repeated. "Y're—"

His words caused her to look round once more. While her gaze was averted he rushed and seized her, pulling her away from the brink.

As his arm encircled her, Jacqueline pressed her elbows against his chest to fend him off, and rained her fists on his face. Cursing while he turned his head from her blows, he dragged her toward the center of the rock.

His free hand tore down her arm, and he hugged her close to him, pinioning her, and reaching for the diamonds that had excited his cupidity. Then it was that the situation passed beyond control.

Shuddering and gasping with horror at the touch of his foul hands, at the contaminating pressure of his body against her own, the girl struggled desperately.

Smashing her head forward, she brought blood to his lips. Snarling in fury, he brought his right hand to her throat and thrust her head back, at the same time bending her body beneath his weight.

So he held her, his bloated face glaring close to hers. And with the warmth of her supple young body playing upon his senses, his face became more hideous as his tongue ranged slowly over his lips in a slavery mingling of tobacco juice and blood.

Jacqueline's brain reeled at what she saw in the brute's face. Only then did it come to her that she was in serious danger—that she was fighting for—everything!

Her distended eyes saw, monstrously magnified, the bloated face that moved

nearer and nearer to her own. The slobbering lips were filthy in their anticipation of being planted against hers, and her blood curdled as she read that intention. The arm about her waist burned her, then left her cold and shivering.

Through the growth of whiskers that reached close up to the lustful eyes she saw foul red blotches come upon the man's cheeks. She crumpled in his grasp, and had to summon all her power to keep from fainting as he turned his head to the side and spat out the tattered cigar stub.

Every second was to the girl an eternity. Not only was she struggling physically, but she was beset mentally as the pure white of her nature was stunned by the enormity, the grossness of the purpose that reeked in every line of that loathly countenance!

She was in the grip of a horror such as she never had imagined, that had risen out of nowhere; and her brain ran riot. She forgot where she was, forgot Dorothy, who with chattering teeth had dragged herself to her feet at last and was tottering toward the rock with some idea of lending help. She forgot all except that she was in the clutches of a beast who was overpowering her, whose very touch was pollution!

As they swayed back and forth and round about she lost her sense of direction. All her effort was centered upon retaining her footing and holding her face away from those cursing, bloody lips.

Viciously she kicked her assailant. The act brought her within an inch of defeat, for at that moment he swung his weight upon her and threw her off her feet.

With a sobbing surge of strength she tore her arms loose and threw his face upward as he would have kissed her.

At his throat her fingers found the huge pin that held his coat together. Scarce knowing what she was doing, she pulled it out and ripped a jagged laceration from his ear to his mouth.

The spurting blood fell on her face and a greater and more nauseating terror encompassed her. Her sight, blurred by the turmoil of the conflict, became clearer for a flash. The wound that she had inflicted, glaring through the uncouth bristling whiskers, made his distorted face infinitely more terrifying. It seemed that the mouth which sought her own had grown to devouring proportions!

The bleared eyes were more animal-like now with their blending of lust and rage and pain. He would kill her now—kill her—and she in that instant of chaotic despair felt that death would be preferable.

She got foothold again, and braced herself for the final effort. Out of the dimness she heard her name:

"Jacqueline!"

Near the end of her strength, realizing that she must soon succumb, that she was swooning, she placed the voice vaguely as that of Dorothy—Dorothy, who should be running for assistance. Then the impatient resentment against Dorothy gave place to a prayer that her chum would escape. Dorothy was of a different mold, not weak, but timid; not cowardly, but lacking the bodily strength to obey her will.

Had she known that Dorothy was dragging herself step by step, compelling her rebellious feet back along the path to the rock, Jacqueline could have given her no more generous thought. Had she known that, she might have clung to her attacker until Dorothy could arrive to create a diversion.

Not knowing, Jacqueline made her supreme endeavor. She saw a dirt-ingrained fist with fearsome knotty knuckles, upraised to smash her in the face. She saw the leering features twitch in a fury of concentrated brutish desire, the yellowed and bloodshot eyes bulging—the slobbery lower lip which she had split with her head, hanging loose, and sickening to behold—the wound that the pin, still in her hand, had made. More than all else, she saw the fist descending, and she knew that if it landed that would be the end.

"Jacqueline!" Dorothy's voice rose again, and to Jacqueline it was less distinct. She gave up all hope of help arriving before—before—

A convulsive shudder shook her as she visioned herself at the mercy of this man. Clouds rolled across her brain. She was

fainting—fainting. The falling fist began to dissolve in the haze that came before her eyes.

Blindly she jabbed the pin into his neck. How deep it went she did not know, but while his snarl of agony resounded the arm he had about her relaxed.

The hand that had been lifted to fell her went instead to pull out the pin that she had left sticking in his flesh. When it failed to strike, the girl's brain reacted. A wave of exulation revived her as she comprehended that his clasp about her body had loosened. She thudded her fists on his face and kicked him; then with a quick wrench she was free.

"Jacqueline!"

The wailing cry from Dorothy told her which way to flee, for Dorothy had reached close to the face of the rock up which she could climb. Jacqueline heard it, and she believed she placed its direction.

With a bellow the tramp was rushing upon her. She had no time to look, to make sure of where she was going. Her only thought was to remain out of his defiling hands.

Dorothy's voice had come from there, behind her—she was sure of that. Nothing, then, stood between her and safety if she but ran fast enough.

Whirling about as the man lunged for her, she ran—eyes unseeing, trusting to the guiding voice of her chum.

But there her overstressed senses proved traitor. The cry that rose once more—

"Jacqueline!"

It came not from behind her, but from the side. She never knew. For at her second flying step she went hurtling far into the gorge—her shriek of terror echoing to the skies—down, down, down, seventy feet to where the stream broils and crashes and whips itself to foam!

A foot from the brink the man who had driven her to death stood watching her tumbling body. For a long minute he was there, bent and peering, stunned and frightened by that shapeless thing that was flung against a rock by the waters only to be snatched back and cast into an eddying pool, where it spun endlessly round and round.

Then he turned and ran—ran blindly, as Jacqueline had run to her death.

He recoiled as Dorothy rose before him on top of the rock. He could have crumpled her between his hands, but with the picture fresh upon him of what was down there in the chasm, the plaything of the stream—of the girl who, through his act, had been, in the space of a breath, transformed into an inanimate, broken bundle of clay—he was afraid of the child who faced him.

The back of his hand rubbed over his mouth, and he wet his lips, not in pleasureable anticipation, as he had done when Jacqueline had seemed to be his to do with as he would, but because they had suddenly become dry and caked with the blood that the girl had drawn.

"Where—" Dorothy's widening eyes covered the summit of the rock and came back to his face—"where is—Jacqueline?"

She had heard Jacqueline's dying shriek, but she shut from her numbed mind the vision of what it meant. She wanted to hear from this man.

"Out the way—" He cowered, wiping his mouth again. "Out the way—" He fingered the wound on his neck, the raw tear on his cheek. These had him marked—he had to get away quickly.

Had the coward in him not prevailed he would have killed Dorothy, too, and made sure of time to make his escape. Instead, he whimpered when she advanced on him—whimpered a threat which, with his mind fixed on the one idea that he must flee, he had not the power to execute.

It was an impossible contest that the girl offered, yet she went at it bravely, with a calm resolution to lose her life, if that were demanded, with the chum she might have aided had her courage come a few minutes earlier.

Actuated by only one thought, flight, the man shoved her aside. As she stumbled he went past her. She leaped after him. He struck her down senseless, and fled into the gathering darkness.

That was the hour—and why shouldn't the natives know, for they were about the place before, and have been since—that the

Rock took up its moaning; that the pines began their *shrrrshing* which is the weaving of the shrouds; that the waters bounded higher and lashed themselves to greater frenzy in a clamor for vengeance!

CHAPTER III.

THE BIRTH OF HATE.

THE lights had been lighted more than an hour when Dorothy reached the Serviss home with news of the tragedy that was to bring such a blight.

Jacqueline's father was sitting before an open fire, the book in his hand neglected for thoughts of his girl—the girl who would be home from school to-morrow to complete the family circle in the Thanksgiving. He smiled into the flames—he could see her there, his girl—their girl.

They had been talking of her until a few minutes ago, when her mother, slight and frail and gentle, had gone to rest a while. They had talked of how the house would be filled again with the spirit of Jacqueline, with her laughter and her quick step, her joyousness, and the permeating, gladsome essence of her presence.

Jacqueline was so remindful of what his wife had been in her youth—embodying all that was sprightly and happy. His wife was happy still, yes, but for many years she had been virtually an invalid—since the coming of the boy who was the only other child.

He looked over at Rex, busy with his school work. They loved Rex just as much, but Jacqueline was the first—she had brought into their lives the first gleam of their greater happiness.

Jacqueline— He recalled the day only a couple of months ago—months that had gone by as years because she was missing from the house—when they had left her at boarding-school. That had been the first parting, and it would have been unbearable had it not been for Jacqueline's good.

He remembered the wistfulness with which she had watched them go—how he had turned hurriedly away so he would not see the quiver in her lip. Her mother had cried, frankly and openly, while he—he had blinked hard, and hastened, lest the teachers in whose care they were leaving their treasure would see his gathering tears.

And to-morrow—to-morrow Jacqueline was to come home!

"Rex—"

"Yes, dad?"

They turned, the boy from his lessons, the father from the scenes he had conjured among the spurting flames on the hearth

"That trout waiting for Jack?"

The boy laughed. "Was down to see him to-day, dad. He's there, all right. And I wrote Jack—"

"We'll have a picnic, son—" Serviss went back to his musing. It would take ten years off his life to see Jack scampering around.

Half closing his eyes, he saw her searching into the deeps of the pool for the trout that Rex, himself hungering to take that prize, had nursed along for her, warning others that this fish belonged to Jack, and on two known occasions fighting youths who went after it. To-morrow—

The barking of the dog kenneled in front of the house broke in on his thoughts. That bespoke an intruder. The barking ceased, to be followed by a thumping on the door. With that he heard the padding of the dog's feet on the porch, and knew that this was no stranger who so frenziedly demanded admittance.

"I'll go, Rex." He stopped the boy, who was moving to open the door.

A damper seemed to fall upon him as he went through the hall. A noisy summons in this quiet countryside was unusual enough, but this sustained slap-slap-slapping on the panels ominously foretold some one in extremity.

His hand was on the knob when besides the pounding he made out a quivering, long-drawn sob. As he opened the door Dorothy fell into his arms.

With vacant, staring eyes she looked up at him. Her features worked into a vacuous grin, and her chin hung loose as she attempted to speak.

Serviss shook her, more savagely than he was aware, to rouse her. He observed the bruised cut on her temple where the slayer of Jacqueline had struck her down.

Something was squeezing, strangling his heart. Dorothy was to come home with Jacqueline. Dorothy was here—hysterical and nerveless, her clothing torn, bedraggled, and soaking—for the rain had come as Jacqueline wished—her hat gone, her hair straggling wildly over her face—strands of her hair between her fingers as she had torn it out in the madness of that death-haunted trip from the rock, of which she was trying so pitifully to tell.

"Jacqueline," she gasped at last, and new lines appeared on the father's face, sketched as by the magic of an etcher's needle.

"Jacqueline," she whispered—and then fainted.

While Serviss carried the girl into the room in which he had been dwelling with such delight on the homecoming of his daughter, the boy fluttered nervously about him. He had heard Dorothy's whispered word, and, understanding that something serious had occurred to his beloved sister, his face, like his father's, grew dark.

"I'll—I'll call mother," he said, as Serviss laid the unconscious girl on a couch. "She—"

"No." Serviss spoke harshly out of the darkness that had descended upon him. He could not let his wife know that tragedy had overtaken them until he could inform her exactly what had happened. To let her share the racking uncertainty which was an agony to him would be but to double the blow. She must imagine the worst—and in her fragile health she was ill-prepared to withstand grievous shock.

"No, Rex." His tone flattened. "We won't tell your mother—not yet. Call Anna to—to—help us."

Silently the boy went for the maid, and stood dreadfully beside his father during the interminable minutes while she revived Dorothy. When at last the girl opened her eyes they were blank, her face devoid of expression. Then came the flood of memory and with it renewed hysteria.

For Serviss and the boy it was a half hour of extreme torture as she droned only: "Jacqueline is dead! Jacqueline is dead"—to know merely that their girl was dead, out there, somewhere. When Dorothy finally told that Jacqueline's body lay crushed and battered at the foot of the Rock, their minds were blissfully dulled so that they could not at once grasp the wretchedness of her end.

Clinging to all that remained earthly of his girl, as he had carried it through the driving rain, with the same grisly blending of ferocity and tenderness, Serviss stalked into his home. He paid no heed to the whispering of those who had seen him pick the poor, shattered body into his arms, when by the flickering lantern light they had found it at the pool where dwelt the great trout that was to be the titbit of her visit home.

Those who had seen recounted with awe the compelling finality and deliberation with which the father had waved them aside as, his face frigid and emotionless, he had stepped forward alone to recover his dead. They pointed to the marvel that Jacqueline's face had not suffered in that seventy-foot plunge to the jagged rocks—that the cold features against which Serviss snuggled his cheek were as divinely beautiful in the repose of death as in the laughter that had marked her life.

And they told in unconsciously lowering tone of how her body had been cast upon a ledge as though laid there by compassionate, fantom hands, her face upturned to the rain in a beatitude that reflected the more vividly the violence of her death.

His dead clasped to his breast, Serviss entered the house with the step of an automaton. The wet, dark hair trailed over his arm; and, staring glassily at the dear face on which a faint smile tinged the full lips, now so cold, with a spiritual touch transcendent, he talked—to it!

Not talk exactly. Rather he crooned as a parent might croon to a child. For the father was living again all the years, aye, each day, since Jacqueline had come to gladden their hearts—since he had knelt by the bedside to thank God as the babe was laid at the mother's breast.

So was he marching, trancelike, through the hall when his wife descended the stairs. The boy, left to guard his mother from this blow, tried to bar her way.

The father's head was bent to that pillowed on his shoulder. His eyes mirroring a soul bruised and envenomed, he did not see his wife. He scarcely heard her scream. While the boy knelt beside her, he went on back to his place by the fire—to remain motionless with her body in his arms as he visioned her again amid the flames, and a hate that cried for vengeance rose searing within him.

CHAPTER IV.

VIRUS OF VENGEANCE.

WITH gloating eyes Serviss traced his finger over the letters newly carved on the Rock—T-W-O! He smiled at his son, who stood beside him. That little clucking noise sounded again in his throat as it had sounded often in the three years since he and the boy had kept stunned vigil beside the bodies of wife and daughter, mother and sister—for the death of Jacqueline had killed her mother that night!

"Two, Rex—two!" he cried; "and there will be eight more! One for every finger on her hands!" His countenance blazed with a godless passion; his hands shut till the knuckles almost burst the skin, and swung above his head. "For every finger on our Jack's hands!"

The boy, now sixteen years old, had heard that many times, but still he did not understand. What was the meaning of this tally on the Rock that had been converted by his father into an everlasting monument to their nearest and dearest? He could comprehend that part of it—the inscription of Jacqueline's and his mother's names. But not the numbers which his father caused at long intervals to be written down.

Again he asked his father that—

"What, dad, do these numbers represent?" His somber eyes shifted in puzzlement from the Rock to his father. He, too, had changed in these years of sorrow, during which his father had kept him close by his side, implanting the code of vengeance, dinning constantly into him that toll must be taken for the death of his mother and sister. Jealously he had kept the boy away from others, that none might counteract the instillation of hate—of hatred toward tramps and criminals, and especially robbers and attackers of women.

Yet he never had confided to his son just how the vengeance was to be executed, although the evidence that it was being taken, somehow, was growing there in that graven panel on the Rock.

Serviss squinted, considering. The boy had proved ready clay. At the formative stage, when the pouring of poison into his heart had begun, his brain had been receptive and absorbent of the cry for vengeance.

But—and this made Serviss pause—the time had not yet arrived when he could be told how payment was being taken for these lives. A year or two more, when the boy had been aroused to a proper fanaticism, when the ceaseless prompting had stamped upon his mind beyond all chance of eradication that his sister and his mother must be avenged to the full, he would be told—and allowed to help!

"I'll tell you, son, when the fifth number is there," he said.

Himself, Serviss was a caricature of his old self. Inches of his height were lost in the rounded shoulders. His face was gaunt and aged, and often, as now before the Rock, it mirrored the hate that saturated his being like a cankered pool.

"When there's five, I'll tell you," he repeated.

The boy put a natural question.

"When will that be?"

His father's features convulsed. That cunning glint was in his eyes. He looked at his hands, folding and unfolding, the fingers sliming over the palms suggestively, then crooking, talonlike.

"Soon, son, soon," he muttered. "Let's pray it will be soon."

If all went well he knew that the third would quickly be recorded, and he clucked again at the prospect, and rubbed his hands.

"I'm going away again next week for a spell," he said. He had just come back the week before from an absence of a month, and the boy might have associated the graving of the second number with that absence had he recalled that number one had been chiseled following an earlier and likewise unexplained journey by his father.

Anger and hatred suffused the son's face. "To hunt the man who killed Jack?" The police never had found trace of him.

"Aye," his father laughed cruelly. "To hunt the man who killed Jack—and your mother. Don't forget that—your mother, too."

Rex turned to the Rock, and his father chuckled at the hardness of the old-young face. The youth's tone testified to the thoroughness of his father's teaching:

"Aren't they ever going to catch him?"

"We're trying, boy—trying always," Serviss answered. "Some day, maybe, we will get him."

He headed away from the Rock, and the boy followed, silent and wondering.

Every blow of the mallet while the stonecutter had graven that second cryptic number, his father had said, had been the driving of a nail into a coffin. He heard those blows yet; and the screeching of the chisel that had eaten into the Rock. Where were the coffins? Who drove the nails? Why were they? He wanted to ask, but a glance at his father told him it would be useless.

A weird smile on his haggard face, his head between his shoulders, Serviss trudged alone. He also was thinking—thinking of his latest journey, and that to come.

His bony hands rubbing, he went over in pleasant retrospect the taking of the second life of the ten he demanded. He could feel again the vibration through his arm from the blackjack's impact with the skull of the thug just out of prison—a thug who had paid all too inadequately with a few years of his liberty for his attack on a woman—and then had been made by Serviss to pay with his life; whose grave was marked by a number in the potter's field, and again was recorded by a number on the Rock!

For it was Serviss's purpose to slay ten criminals and thus make their outlawed class atone for the crime of the one among them who had slain his girl!

Those who had assailed women or robbed on the highway he sought out. Night after night he checked over the newspaper clippings received from a bureau in Boston, and from these he listed names and sentences. Then he watched for the release of these men, and if he could he killed them.

Several times he had failed, but twice he had succeeded.

In both cases, as Serviss had expected, the authorities had attributed the murders to revenge, but to their idea it was the revenge of former pals. It was a plausible theory, considering that the victims were newly out of prison—their slayers had been awaiting that day. Nor was there any reason to connect these two killings; for they had occurred more than a year apart in cities a thousand miles from one another.

Serviss cackled quietly. Next week he was going after another—a man who was finishing a ten-year sentence for an attack on a girl. This one he surely would get!

Some day Serviss hoped that chance would deliver to him the man who had forced his girl to death—and killed his wife. It was typical of his madness—for of course he was mad—that he should entertain such an improbability. Meanwhile, he went methodically about the execution of the program he had laid down and the insidious preparation of his boy for the day when he would be able to lend a hand—to join in the killing!

CHAPTER V.

SEED OF SENTIMENT.

WHILE his father was away on his mission of murder, Rex talked with Dorothy Lonsdale for the first time since that double funeral at which his boyhood had terminated.

After that he had had no heart to play; and when his grief had become not less, perhaps, but more endurable, he had passed under the hypnotic malignancy that dominated his parent. In that state the desire for companionship, other than that of his father, who would talk endlessly of their great loss, disappeared. He became solitary; morbid, almost misanthropic, roaming the hills alone or sitting for hours at the Rock when his father was absent.

Among other things his father had taught him that Dorothy could have saved Jacqueline; that had she also given battle to the tramp, Jacqueline would not have fallen to death.

Serviss never spoke of how Dorothy had overcome her panic and gone back to fight —too late, it was true, but she had gone, although almost in collapse from fear. From the servants Rex had heard of that part of the incident, but when he had mentioned it his father had dismissed it with an angry sneer, declaring that the girl had lied in an attempt to make her cowardly pose heroic.

So, as Serviss wished, there welled in the boy a resentment against his dead sister's chum which bordered on hatred.

It was at the Rock that they met. She was there when he came down the path from the road.

Frowning, he stopped on catching sight of her, for Dorothy was on her knees, her head bowed in prayer. His lip curled in scorn. Remembering what his father had said, he told himself that she had need to pray there at the death-place of the friend and the scene of her own fatal cowardice.

He did not approach until she had risen to her feet and was moving slowly away. Without looking at her he would have passed, although they were within a few inches of each other on the narrow path.

"Rex!"

Even then he would have gone by without acknowledgment, but she caught his arm.

Flushing, he swung his head to face her. His eyes smoldered. Why should she be here and Jacqueline dead? Lips tight, he stared at her.

"Rex," she spoke softly, "why can't we be—friends? We—both loved Jack—"

It might have been his father laughing, so harsh was the note—

"Loved her—" he derided. "*You* loved her—and you ran and left her to be—to be killed!'" He laughed again and would have gone on, but she held his arm. Her gaze compelled him to meet it, and, unaccountably, he became restless before the clear eyes that were so rich and still so sorrowful. Grudgingly he saw that she was pretty —and hastened to remind himself that Jacqueline had been beautiful.

Watching her eyes grow moist, he smiled and tried to convince himself that he was glad he had hurt her. But he could not be sure that he was glad. Had his father witnessed this he would have nodded wisely and mentally commented that he had been right in holding Rex not yet old enough nor strong enough in his hatred to take part in the exaction of vengeance.

"I did run, Rex—yes," she said quietly. "I—I thought Jack was running with me. But—I—as soon as I could make my body move, I went back. Jack was—was—" Her voice broke, and all the horror of that minute three years ago crept into her expression.

The boy stood still. His father had said that she lied in telling this. But, hearing it from her own lips, it seemed that his father must be wrong.

To hear her affirm it and meet his accusing, condemning gaze so frankly as she did, gave her words the brand of truth.

He wanted to resent that—knew that he should resent it. To believe her he must disbelieve his father. She had a reason for lying—to conceal her cowardice—his father had—none. Of course he hadn't. Why should his father wish to arouse hatred against this girl?

"Why don't you believe me, Rex?" she asked. "I was a coward—I know that—but I did the best I could. When I ran, I thought Jack was with me. Then when I fell—there," she pointed a few yards along the path, "and saw Jack was struggling with the man, I—I could not move, I was so frightened. Then—then I did go back—"

She paused again, unable to speak of that moment when she had found that Jacqueline lay battered in the gorge—of the climax that had occurred in the tragedy while she was scrambling to the summit of the rock.

"Look, Rex." She was pathetically eager to convince him. She pushed the hair from her temple. "Look. There is the scar he made when he felled me as I tried to stop him—or make him kill me, too."

"You got that before you ran," blurted the boy. He was angry now, not at her, but at himself. He was thinking, against his will, how little difference it would have made had this girl thrown herself into that death-struggle.

His glowering eyes went over her small

figure—she did not weigh a hundred pounds. He looked at the tiny hand resting on his arm. She could have been hurled aside like a feather so that Jacqueline anyhow, would have been left alone in the unequal contest with the brute.

Her mouth compressed at his bald declaration that she was lying. Her hands dropped in a gesture of resignation. With a nod of good-by she departed.

In turn he stopped her. The impulse to let her know that he did believe her was uncontrollable. He did not yield entirely to it, but there was a note of apology in his voice.

"My father—" he began, and checked himself. He would not tell her that his father had lied to him, had sought to create feeling against her. "I was told," he amended shortly, "that you did nothing to help Jack."

He blushed in embarrassment at the change that came to her—at the way in which she caught his hand, at the gratitude in her speech.

"You believe me, then, Rex? You know—I was so dreadfully afraid."

"Yes," he said gruffly, and for the time he became a normal boy, bashful and stammering, his premature age falling from him as he asked whether they might walk home together.

At that moment he felt oppressed by the loneliness that had become his habit. He felt the need of the companionship which his father had endeavored to teach him to do without. And, covertly watching this girl who had been Jacqueline's chum, his momentarily boyish heart decided that her companionship would be most desirable because she, too, had fragrant memories of Jacqueline.

So together they walked home, along the road over which Dorothy had stumbled in the dark that evening with the news of Jacqueline's death.

They did not talk of the dead girl; they talked little at all. To the boy the moment was very new and very strange. To the girl it marked a step for which she long had wished—a word of understanding from the big house where Serviss and his son lived like the cloistered.

The picture of this lonely boy had been with her often, and in her letters from school she never failed to ask her mother about him. It had seemed to her, as to others, a needless echo of the blight that had come upon the Serviss home, this seclusion of the boy by his father, and the consequent robbing of the life that was his due. It gave him no chance to forget.

She hoped that now she would be able to rouse him out of himself, to take from him that sullenness, and hear him laugh as he should laugh.

That was the thought which caused her to inquire:

"When is your father coming home?" She wanted to propose that they meet again, but doubted whether it would be possible if Serviss were around. He kept his boy too close.

Rex shook his head. "I don't know. Any day, I guess."

She looked at him quickly. She wondered whether he suspected that the whole countryside accounted his father crazy?

When he spoke to any one, which was seldom, Serviss always tried to be like his old quiet, even studious, self, but he had not been largely successful. His altered appearance, that crouching manner of holding his head, and his haggard features, but more noticeably the flickering, cunning glint in his eyes, had revealed him as queer, if not really insane.

But there was only sympathy for him. He was harmless, wasn't he? And wasn't the shock he had received sufficient to unhinge a strong mind?

For want of anything better to say, Rex referred to her father. The query was suggested by the absence of his own parent. Distantly he remembered that Lonsdale used to be gone from home for long periods.

"Your father home now?"

He wasn't looking at her or he must have seen the pain that crossed her face. Her little hands shut, and her cheeks paled. That was a secret which her mother had succeeded well in keeping from their friends and neighbors. It was a secret which only Dorothy shared; and she chilled now in the warm sunshine at this reminder of it. They tried to forget that, her mother and herself,

and for the last half hour, when her thoughts had been all with Jacqueline and the boy at her side, she had forgotten. Innocently, he had brought back the other shadow that haunted her—her father.

"No," she answered, and reverted to the question of extending her friendship with the boy. "Will you come over to visit us to-morrow? My mother would like to have you."

Her flush served in place of her own assurance that he would be doubly welcome.

Rex thought that over. It was so long since he had been anywhere out of his father's company.

They were at his house now. He went on past it with the girl.

"Maybe I'll come," he said, as they reached her gate. He looked searchingly into her face, then still boylike, his gaze wavered. "Yes," he added, "yes—I'll come," and he hurried off.

Along the road he looked back. Dorothy was standing by the gate as he had left her, watching him.

He quickened his pace, and in reaction from this brief brightness that had illuminated his dark life he upbraided himself as disloyal to his father, disloyal to the memory of Jacqueline and his mother.

It was disloyalty, was it not, to place the girl's word before his father's? If that were so, was it not disloyalty to those his father was avenging?

Those whom his father was avenging—he wrinkled his brows. What was this vengeance? How was it being carried out?

He regretted having talked with Dorothy. His father had shown that he should hate her. In the brief space they had been together he had discovered that he did not hate her.

For the first time he realized that his father would bend his mind against all his fellows; that he had been swayed to hate not only criminals, but everybody!

That was while Serviss chortled aboard a train on the way home from the consummation of his third stroke of vengeance! Another assailant of a girl was gone. Serviss could see the knife quivering in his heart. He damned the express train as too slow. He could not rest until the third numeral was blazoned on the Rock!

CHAPTER VI.

THE DREAD ALTERNATIVE.

THE fifth mark of revenge, Serviss had promised his son, would bring an explanation. It brought a startling revelation to the boy, and did away with the need of explanation.

Rex was nineteen years old when it came about. Since Dorothy Lonsdale had set him thinking, during the years in which he had been approaching maturity, he had come to notice the peculiarity in his father which was more than the mere evidence of grief.

Gradually it had been impressing itself that his father was not quite right in the head; he was the last to see that.

Lately he had been away from home oftener, and always on his return he had been in a fury, and his song of hate had boomed louder. That was because he had failed for long to add a single victim to his roll of death.

On the occasion of the fourth killing, his luck had changed. He then had barely escaped capture.

For nearly two years no mallet had sounded the hammering of coffin nails at the rock while he stood by and chuckled!

The revelation was granted the boy on an evening when a tramp asked a hand-out at the door.

Serviss opened the door.

Rex was amazed as the frowsy wayfarer was invited in. His father giving alms to a member of the fraternity against whom he had preached such intense loathing! It was inconceivable.

The boy, with that preaching ringing in his brain, opened his mouth to protest. He halted the words as he became aware of the look on his father's face.

Bidding the man wait in the hall, Serviss was heading into the rear of the house. He motioned to his son to be still.

From an inclination to protest the giving of assistance to the tramp, Rex found himself giving way to a desire to warn the man to get out—to flee. But it seemed ab-

surd to do that. This was only another indication of his father's mental state. He had suffered a revulsion, and from hatred had gone to the other extreme, sympathy and charity.

Very well. Rex was content. Now he could tell his father of his friendship with Dorothy, which had continued, but of which he never had dared speak. If his father had changed so that he could offer kindness to a man of the breed he had most detested, surely he no longer could harbor feeling against Jacqueline's dearest friend—Dorothy, who had been willing to sacrifice her life with Jacqueline.

Such was the process of the boy's thought as he waited for his father to reappear. He did not speak to the tramp, who watched him with a degree of nervousness, apparently sensing the uncertain atmosphere.

They were eying each other when Serviss glanced cautiously from a door. The tramp was looking away from him.

Rex observed the movement of his father, however, and his eyes switched that way.

While the cry of alarm and of warning rose in his throat, his father raised a shotgun and pulled the trigger. The charge, at pointblank range, took half the tramp's head off.

Serviss was about to fire the other barrel into the body when Rex rushed upon him and knocked the gun up. The shot thudded into the ceiling.

Thrusting his son aside, Serviss ran and flung the cuter door wide open. From back in the house came a scream and a scuffling as the two women servants trembled over the meaning of the shots.

Rex gaped at the bloody corpse. Now that the power to do further danger was out of his father's hands, the gun empty, the youth was frozen with horror.

His father shook him.

"We found that man breaking into the house," he whispered. His eyes dilated, and he clucked. "Go tell the servants it's all right—all right!" His shoulders quivered with low, insane laughter. "And telephone for the officer. Tell him I've killed a burglar in self-defense."

Rex did not move. It had been so deliberate, this killing. He shuddered to think what might happen if he told his father of his association and intimacy with Dorothy Lonsdale!

"Go!" The command grated in his ear. "We've got to have the officer here before we can have this dirty mess cleaned up!"

The utter callousness staggered the boy. But still he did not grasp the whole significance of the slaughter—not until Serviss gurgled triumphantly:

"For every finger on her hands! That's five! Five—thank God!"

Then did the full shock of knowledge strike Rex Serviss like a blow between the eyes.

The riddle of the numbers on the Rock was cleared for him with the recollection that none had been set down except after his father had been on a journey. He grew sick as his imagination ran wild on what had occurred on these journeys. If his father could commit a cold-blooded act like this, Heaven alone knew what else he had done!

He steadied his dazed brain to listen:

"The five others, Rex—Jack's other hand—we, you and I, will get together!" The cackling laughter sounded again. "You're big enough now, Rex, to lend a hand. Together we'll fill the panel quicker! And, Rex"—the boy shuddered at the touch on his shoulder—"maybe we'll fill another. Ten for Jack's fingers—ten for your mother's!"

But the boy could stand no more. With a cry he ran from the twin-horror of his father and that half-headed thing in the middle of the floor.

It was Serviss himself who notified the authorities. He was calm with that subtle, disarming calmness of the insane, when he told his story to the constable, and later to the coroner. The tramp, he declared, had refused to retreat under threat with the gun.

"He had overcome my boy, here," said Serviss, "and Rex is far stronger than I am." He shook his head mournfully. "I had no other course than to shoot. Isn't that right, Rex?"

Chalk-faced, still dazed, Rex sat with lowered head. He must either denounce his father as a brutal murderer or corroborate his statement. He could not do the former.

"Yes," he whispered, "that's right."

The coroner signed a permit for the burial, and handed it to the county undertaker, who already had removed the body. He silently lamented the wreck of the former John Serviss that was before him.

"Why don't you come to see us sometimes, John?" he asked kindly. "Or let us come to see you?"

"I will — sometime," returned Serviss.

The doctor did not press his invitation. Long ago he had concluded that Serviss was slightly daft—a bit out of his head, but harmless.

Thoughtlessly he referred to the cause of it all.

"Some one should have been handy with a gun when that beast attacked Jack." He snapped his teeth on the remark, his glance offering regret for having opened the old wound.

As on the night of Jacqueline's death, when Serviss had sat before this same hearth clasping her body, the light in the other's eyes caused him to start. But, whereas in that agonized moment the light had been a dulled suffering and stupefaction, now it was something unholy, with a devilish laughter behind it.

"Yes," Serviss agreed softly, "there should have been somebody—with a gun."

Throughout the two days until the inquest Rex Serviss wrestled with his problem. He argued in circles to justify his father's actions. He had no idea who the other four enumerated on the rock had been, but reviewing the ceaseless reiteration that criminals were a worthless asset to the community, he assumed rightly that these four had been criminals.

While he debated he walked for wearying hours over the hills, seeking the roughest trails in vain effort to tire himself so that he could sleep. If he gave his father up for his crime, they might electrocute him—they might rule that he was sane. Madmen had gone to the chair. His father might; and if that came about he would be sent there by his own son.

On the other hand, if he allowed his father to remain at large the indiscriminate killing would continue; and he, knowing of it, would be equally guilty, although he took no actual part in it, as his father seemingly expected him to do.

It was a choice, therefore, of placing his father in danger of the electric-chair or waiting a while and having him restrained in an institution. The alternative was little more preferable, but it was unavoidable—unless he could in some way prevail upon the madman to call a halt to his vengeance.

At the inquest Rex bore out the statement that Serviss had fired in self-defense.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LONSDALE SKELETON.

A LONG siege of illness that lasted through the winter, and the spring left Serviss so weak he was nearly helpless, and interrupted the plans of both father and son.

The boy regarded it as a providential relief because it delayed the necessity of making some disposition of his parent. The latter fretted and swore over his enforced activity. He demanded that Rex keep up-to-date the information on arrests and convictions, and to humor him it was done.

But, though he bitterly assailed his son for the refusal, he could not persuade him to waylay any of the several convicts he had marked down whose release took place during that period. Neither did Rex have the killing of the tramp recorded on the Rock—but he told his father that he had.

Dorothy Lonsdale finished college that year. The day after she reached home Rex went walking with her. She inquired about his father, and as once before he blundered onto tender ground.

"Doesn't your father ever come home, Dot?"

She trembled, on the verge of a confession. Some day she would have to tell Rex. The sooner she did so, the sooner they would begin readjusting their lives,

he and she, to the parting which she was confident her confession would precipitate.

She plucked a branch from a bush, and to cover her agitation picked the leaves from it as she pondered, her thoughts filled with the news her mother had just given her—that her father was coming home. His health was broken, he had written, and he asked them to give him refuge, which they could not deny.

"He is coming home, Rex," she replied; but she did not tell that which she supposed would forever sever their friendship. She would stave that off to the last. "Let —let us talk of—Jacqueline."

Undirected, their steps took them to the Rock. There they came upon Serviss leaning upon a cane and quaking with rage at the discovery that the fifth number had not been inscribed.

Had they not been rapt in their conversation and their comradeship, they would have observed him in time to turn back, as Rex would have done under the circumstances. He heard them, however, before they saw that he was present.

His withered face empurpled. He started to run at them, came uplifted. As the girl shrank away, Rex saw that it was she who would have received the first blow. He stood before her, but his father wabbled to a halt before reaching them and was forced to lay the cane to the ground to keep himself erect.

With a whispered word to Dorothy to remain at a distance, Rex went to his father. His arm, offering support, was shoved aside.

"You damned liar!" screamed Serviss. "And you"—he snarled with unconcealed hatred at the girl—"you—"

"Father!" Rex grasped him by the arms. "Dorothy," he begged, "please go. I—I'll come to you after I take my father home."

Nodding understanding, pity marking her face, the girl hurried away. What she had seen had convinced her that gossip had been right in saying Serviss was crazy, and, her life shadowed by her own father, she could feel with Rex to the most cutting pang.

When she passed out of view Serviss's outburst subsided. He suffered Rex to lead him, muttering curses upon Dorothy; and upon his son because the fifth act of vengeance had not been tabulated.

Immediately on arriving home he telephoned orders to the stone-cutter to go at once to the Rock. Gun in hand, he summoned his son and promised to kill him if he interfered with the work under way—if he sought to quiet the mallet that sounded the driving of nails into a coffin-lid!

Realizing that the threat to kill in all likelihood would be carried out before he could have his father placed under restraint, Rex obeyed him. If his inactivity in this would pacify his father he was willing to stand inactive—for he wished to defer as long as possible the putting of his parent into an asylum.

He let his thoughts go to Dorothy. His last impression was of her eyes, big and round, as she departed. He contained himself patiently until his father should settle down and he could go to her.

After a time, when Serviss had fallen into a sullen brooding, Rex spoke of something that had been revolving in his mind since his father had become ill.

"Dad," he began abruptly, paused; then with a quick breath came straight to the point: "Dad—don't you think you've taken toll enough?"

He was prepared for another violent denunciation, but it did not come at once.

"Eh?" Serviss's head swiveled on his bowed shoulders. He was busy with a new idea—an idea that the day's encounter had suggested. "What's that you say?"

The son was emboldened.

"Jack would not want you to do as you are doing. She does not want vengeance. Nor does mother." He moved over beside the other's chair. "Haven't you done enough evil, dad?"

"Enough!" His father's laugh was loud. Jerking round, he clutched his son's wrist. He clucked insanely. "Not till as many more of them as I can put there are under the sod, like our girl."

He laughed again, but in the midst of it stopped, his eyes narrowing, shrewd in their madness. He drew Rex closer. "That girl has got you," he flared. "You're going back on your sister and your mother."

The grip on the boy's wrist hurt, but when he tried to release it the skinny fingers dug deeper with an uncanny strength. Involuntarily he pulled away to arms-length, frightened by the fiendish intensity of the gaze that bit into him.

"But, dad," he reasoned gently, "these men had nothing to do with—*it*."

His flesh crept at the remembrance of the killing he had witnessed. And there had been four more! He never could let his father go at liberty again. There was little probability that he would kill any one hereabout—he had demonstrated that he was clever enough to carry his scheme of vengeance far afield, where the killings could not be connected with him. But he must never be allowed to make another of these trips, each of which had been potential of the death of a man.

His father looked at him owlishly, considering this defense of his victims.

"That girl's got you," he repeated, rolling the words accusingly.

Rex shifted irritably. "She could not have saved Jack—"

More menacing in his deliberation, Serviss got ponderously to his feet. He pushed his son against a table. Cruelty ascended over the craftiness in his countenance. His elbows clove to his ribs while his talony fingers worked with a repellant reptilian movement.

With a sudden change of mood he shook his head—sorrowfully.

"You're mad, son—mad!" he asserted. His fury erupted anew. "Why do you plead for her? She's to blame. She ran and left Jack to die! Why do you plead for her?" He pressed his face closer, and his voice lowered. "God!" he breathed brokenly. "My girl murdered! My wife murdered! My boy gone mad!"

Governed as much by the domination of the insane eyes so near his own as by the futility of further argument, Rex held his tongue. He saw the danger into which he had brought Dorothy by attracting to her all his father's hatred. And he resolved to watch ceaselessly that no harm might come to her.

He felt a hand on his cheek, a hand placed lovingly, but which seemed slimy, scaly, repulsive; and he had to grit his teeth now to tolerate his father's touch. The words accompanying the—the caress, for it was a caress, were soothing.

"Don't you care, boy. Don't you care." Serviss nodded again over his new idea. "I'll get them all!"

Rex roused himself from the thrall. He caught his father by the shoulders.

"Please, dad, no more," he entreated. "Let's go away—away and forget—"

Serviss interrupted, sneering: "Dorothy Lonsdale!" he cackled. "You know her father's a jailbird, don't you? You know he's been a convict these last five years? Eh? No? Well, he has—just think that over when you think of her."

And he sat down to laugh long and screechily at the gaping, incredulous stare which made his son's face at once so tragic and so ludicrous.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADMAN'S GUILE.

FOR more than a week Rex had no opportunity to talk with Dorothy Lonsdale. He dreaded to leave his father. Serviss was too quiescent—dangerously so, his son considered. There had been no evidence in him of violence since his explosion at sight of Rex and Dorothy together. He had not referred to the girl again, nor made further remark about her father. He seemed content to sit motionless, without speaking, for hours upon hours.

The only sign of peculiarity was that he insisted upon having a fire on the hearth although the September days were warm; but that his son excused through the fact that his father's vitality was low after his long illness.

When he did speak to his son it was with a tender solicitude that was strikingly at variance with the incident immediately preceding this strange alteration in his manner. The hate which he had nourished throughout the years apparently was gone from his mind so far as any outward expression indicated. This puzzled and worried the boy until, with a ray of hope, he began to think that by some further quirk of the

brain his father had forgotten Jacqueline and his heretofore insatiable demand for vengeance. If that were so—

Suppressing his excitement over such a possibility, Rex put it to the test. He mentioned Jacqueline casually—and watched for the effect.

"Jacqueline?" Serviss echoed the name meaninglessly. He bent his head slightly, his eyes half closing as though he were concentrating to recall some one named Jacqueline. Really he was hiding from his son the kindling glare in his eyes, for his murdered daughter was there before him, as always, in the flames. He could see her best there, as he had seen her the night Dorothy had come to tell that she was dead.

"Dad!" The boy's heart gave a leap. He almost ran across the room to lay his hands affectionately on his father's shoulders. His feelings underwent another revulsion. The horror he had entertained toward his father disappeared. The terrible acts Serviss had committed could not be blotted out, it was true, but he had not been responsible, and they must be forgotten now that he had shaken off the obsession to kill. And if Jacqueline, in whose name he had slain, had passed from his mind, the corollary was plain that he would kill no more.

"Don't you remember Jack—my sister, dad?" Rex leaned over his shoulder to look into his face, but Serviss kept his eyes veiled.

"Of course." Serviss nodded. His voice was quiet. "Jack's at school. Is—is your mother in?"

Rex caught his breath. A great thankfulness possessed him. His father still was mad, but no longer with that devouring mania that had cost five lives. He would be able now to keep his father at home, to watch over him, and give him again the love that belonged to him.

"No; mother is—out," he answered steadily. This amazing development made him dizzy. It was more than he ever had hoped for. He prayed that it would last, that this blank which had come into his father's memory would maintain, and so let him end his life in peace.

But—his sudden happiness clouded—how could he be sure that the page was wiped clean? Might not some chance word, the viewing of some familiar object, bring back to the poor, disordered brain all the ghastly purpose that now appeared to be obliterated?

He experimented again.

"Dorothy Lonsdale is home," he said distinctly—and he trembled over the result. If anything would, this mention of Dorothy must reawake the homicidal mania.

His father turned, his wasted features quizzical, his eye mild.

"Dorothy's at school with Jack, isn't she?" he asked.

For minutes the boy stared at him. It was true. He could see nothing but gentleness, and fresh pity gripped him as he realized to the full what a mere semblance this man was to his father.

With a sob he laid his cheek against his parent's; his arm went protectingly about the other's neck. He would take him away—away where there would be nothing to suggest the devastating tragedy that had blackened the years.

"Yes," he heard himself saying, "Dorothy goes to school with Jack, but—she's home on a—visit."

He would take his father away. In the middle of that resolution he paused. To go away would mean leaving Dorothy. The gladness died from his face. He could not do that. With disconcerting abruptness he comprehended how large a part the girl had in his life—she who had brought him back to the world out of the vengeful loneliness in which he had been isolated.

His face became somber again as he contemplated the future. The choice was not his. His own desires had to be submerged. He must think first of his father. That by far outbalanced the question of his own happiness. If taking him away would assure continued ease of mind to his father, then he would have to part from Dorothy. He was too young, he felt, to marry her now. Besides, there was the danger that the too frequent sight of her might provoke in Serviss the memory which so mercifully had departed.

The boy straightened, but there was a weariness in his figure. He stroked his father's hair, and his heart filled as a hand came up to pet his own.

"When is your mother coming back, son?" Serviss's voice had the timbre that belonged to years ago, and Rex did not miss it. He saw his father now as sane enough except for the blessed forgetfulness of the long period in which he had schemed nothing but murder. And he returned an evasive answer that brought a satisfied nod.

An hour later Rex slipped quietly from the room. His father was asleep—so the boy thought. He wanted to see Dorothy; he would see her every day now, he told himself hungrily—every day until he went away. He wanted to tell her of the change that had been wrought in his father; and he smiled at the recollection that Serviss had declared Dorothy's father was a convict. Undoubtedly, that had been a momentary insane imagining.

With a curious blending of light-heartedness and despair, he strode along the road. When he glanced backward at the house in which he had left his father apparently asleep, he exulted. When he looked ahead, at Dorothy's house, his spirits drooped, and he knew that for him the shadows had not all been lifted.

Had he been aware that his father was peering warily after him from a window, the while he clucked in that same hideous way and stretched his bony fingers in evil anticipation, the part measure of happiness newly come to him, would have been dispelled.

Rex was entering the girl's home, as his father, grinning over a letter, noted the time and also hurried from the house. And he went with a strong, sure step that would have surprised his son, who believed him almost too weak to get around.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TALE COMPLETE.

NOT till he had finished his recital did Rex notice that Dorothy wasn't as responsive to his enthusiasm as he had expected she would be. He was on the spur of telling her the whole story, of confiding to her at least something of what his father had been, so that she might better understand how much his present mental attitude meant, when he observed her detachment.

In his disappointment he reviewed the few exclamations she had made during his narrative, and he found that they had been flat, even forced. His hands, in which hers lay, relaxed. It depressed and hurt him that she did not evince more interest.

"Don't you care, Dorothy, about my father?" he asked, with a trace of resentment. "I know he hasn't been—well, friendly to you, that he has been unjust, but you knew, everybody knew, that he was—not sane. Couldn't you make allowance for that?"

They were sitting on the porch of her home, she staring away off down the road. She turned her face to him, and even in his own preoccupation he at last perceived how tired and pale she looked.

"I do care, Rex—you know I care. And I—I'm glad." She spoke dully, her thoughts seemingly still far away. She made up her mind. A wan smile touched her lips. Her fingers pressed his harder, and he noticed now that they were cold. As though she would gain courage from him, she leaned closer. The lines at the corners of her mouth became accented, and her eyes grew heavier.

"I have something to tell, too, Rex—about my father," she said quickly. "He—he has been—in prison. He is coming home," she ended jerkily; "he may get here to-day."

A sense of impending disaster swept over Rex. Chilled by it, he sat unmoving, silent. How had his father come to know about Lonsdale? What was the significance in his possession of that knowledge? He remembered the record of prison sentences kept by Serviss, and the remembrance was like an icy blast.

The girl interrupted his thoughts. She misunderstood his prolonged silence.

"I don't suppose"—each word seemed to sap her life-blood, but she tried to smile—"that you will—will want to—to marry the daughter of—of a—"

"Hush!" His fingers went firmly over her lips. His father's insanity had embraced all criminals. Lonsdale was a criminal—and he was the father of the girl Serviss had blamed for the death of Jacqueline!

And Lonsdale might reach home to-day! A burning fear consumed him. He jumped to his feet, pulling the girl up with him.

"Wait here for me," he told her rapidly. "I'll explain—I must go to my father now."

Certain that his worst fear would prove true, he ran home. The servants could tell him nothing; they had not seen Serviss go.

He noted the time. An hour had elapsed since he left his father. And—here was a cogent factor in his presentiment—the afternoon train was due at the village, two miles away, fifteen minutes ago!

Running back to Dorothy he asked her: "Why was your father in prison? Quick!" he shook her by the arms. "Tell me."

"He shot a woman!" she whispered. "This last time. Before that, he was—a thief. He did not kill her—"

The rest of her speech was lost as Rex drew her down the steps and along the road.

"We'll get an automobile," he said grimly, "and go to meet your father." Yet even then he could have sworn that they were too late.

John Serviss grinned at Lonsdale. They were seated together in the one jolting machine that the village boasted for hire.

"Dorothy asked me to meet you," he repeated. "Her mother is very ill, so she couldn't come."

Lonsdale, his health ruined by the years in prison, stared ahead. His features bore the imprint of his thoughts—and his thoughts were poisoned with the dirtiness of his heart and soul. He was going home to make them pay, his wife and daughter; to take out upon them his revenge for the penalties that the law had extracted from him. He'd make them sweat and cringe!

"Do the people know where I've been?"

Even Serviss, wrapped up as he was in his own designs, felt the uncleanliness of this man's spirit.

"No; they don't," he replied. "Just your own folks—and I."

"Good!" Lonsdale chuckled. "Good!" He couldn't have wished it better, than that his wife had succeeded in preserving the secret of his whereabouts. Their shame would be the greater when he himself told it, as he would, to grind them down. It would be sport to watch them shrink as their neighbors pointed at them, the wife and daughter of a convict.

He looked inquiringly as Serviss ordered the driver to stop.

"My girl was killed down there," said Serviss. "I always stop when I come this way—to say a prayer for her."

Lonsdale never had heard of Jacqueline's death. Serviss did not tell how it had occurred, but he did mention that he had turned the Rock into a monument. He asked Lonsdale to accompany him, and together they walked down the path.

Sneering over his speculation upon the welcome that awaited him, framing the first biting speeches for wife and daughter, Lonsdale only half-consciously noticed the five numbers in the carven panel. He saw the mother's name, however, and spoke of it abstractedly.

Serviss answered with a grunt, and passed round the angle of the Rock. He started to climb to the top.

"Come up here till I show you," he called. Still absorbed in jeering contemplation of his reception, Lonsdale followed.

His blazing face averted, Serviss walked over to look down into the gorge.

"She fell down there," he said. "Look."

Lonsdale stepped to his side at the chasm's brink. With a wild shriek Serviss seized him. All his maniacal frenzy burst forth. He shoved his victim over the edge, and with the strength of madness held him.

"It was your daughter that killed her," he screamed, "killed my girl!"

His hellish laughter resounded as Lonsdale, his feet still on the rock while his body was suspended over that seventy-foot drop, scrambled vainly to save himself.

"She killed my Jacqueline!" shrilled the madman. "And when I'm done with you I'm going to kill her!"

Hopeless as his position was, Lonsdale

made a final, convulsive effort. His clawing hands closed on Serviss's arms. He tried to haul himself back to safety, twitching his body upward with every ounce of energy he could summon. Then his body slumped back, suddenly, as he fainted.

An instant Serviss teetered, thrown off his balance by the dead-weight as his victim sagged. Together, while the laughter of the madman reechoed, they went whirling to death.

Rex Serviss turned shivering from the gorge. He led Dorothy away from it. She must not see what he had just looked upon. It was enough that she would be haunted by that last, crazy, skirling laughter of his father's which had rung out as they reached the end of the path.

Mutely they looked at one another. His eyes told all there was to tell, and as she sobbed he took her in his arms. While they waited for the help, that the machine which had brought their fathers here to death, had gone to bring, he held her close in the lengthening shadows, and related all he knew of the mad vengeance born of the murder of Jacqueline.

"And now," he finished as she became rigid with the horror of it. "Now it is done." He looked at her head resting with face buried on his shoulder, and gulped the choking in his throat. "You said to-day that I wouldn't want to marry you because —because—" He left the reference to her father unsaid. "Now it is you who will not—"

"Hush!" Her face, wet with tears, lifted, while she took between her soft palms his face, aged again far beyond his years. "The dead are dead, Rex. We—we must join our sorrow and—our happiness."

So for the moment did love brighten this place of death.

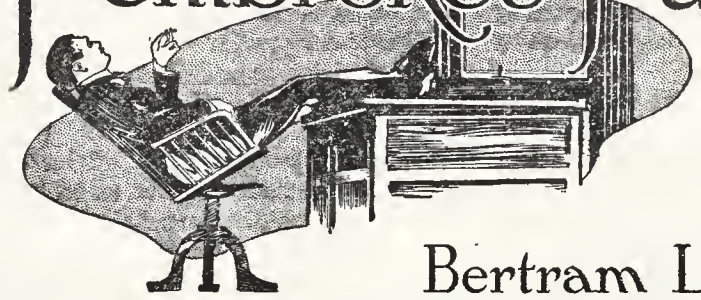
EPILOGUE

THE pines, themselves damned, stark and aching for rest, endlessly tell the rustling of the shrouds. The creek, deep in its rugged, tortuous bed, mumbles protest that it has been cheated, that ten were promised; then it batters and makes sport of the five—or six—that were given. The Voices: That liquid note — hear it! — is hers; the gentle tone, her mother's; the swelling anger—there!—her father bidding Jacqueline cease her prayers for the release of those who are numbered on the Rock, who—listen!—moan forever their purgatorious lament!

But come some night when the moon is full.

(The End.)

Pembroke's Partner



by Bertram Lebhar

FOR a moment I could not quite make up my mind whether to be indignant or amused.

"Thirty dollars a week!" I exclaimed, with an ironical laugh that was a compromise between the two moods. "And you expect me, an honor student at law school, and with five years' experience as a practising attorney, to come to work here at that salary! Why, I know a man—an unskilled, illiterate foreigner—who makes a much bigger income by washing windows!"

The great lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"Evidently window-cleaners are scarcer than law clerks," he remarked cynically. "I am offering you all that you would be worth to us, Mr. Pembroke. Sorry we can't interest you in the position. In case you should happen to change your mind before the vacancy is filled you might let us hear from you again."

I strode out of his office, resentful, disappointed, and somewhat crushed in spirit. But by the time the elevator reached the street level my optimism had begun to assert itself.

It was a bit of a blow to my self-esteem to discover that in these days of the shrunken dollar my services were appraised at such a low valuation by one of the biggest and most prosperous law firms in New York City, but no doubt there were other firms who would be quick to place a fairer and more flattering value on them.

When presently I arrived at my own office, on the twentieth floor of the Drummond Building, I had so far recovered from my chagrin and dejection that McIlvaine, my partner, mistook the smile on my face for a signal of success.

"You landed it?" he greeted me, before I had a chance to say a word.

"The position is mine, I believe, if I decide to take it," I told him. "They are in need of a managing clerk who is experienced in corporation, surrogate's, real estate and trial work. I had a talk with Berger, the head of the firm, and I think I can say that I succeeded in convincing him that I am the man they are looking for."

"But you haven't fully decided yet? You didn't definitely arrange to go with them?" my partner asked, with an anxious frown.

"Not exactly. We couldn't quite agree on the question of salary. Old Berger got reckless and offered me thirty dollars per week. I am to let him hear from me later in case I find that my conscience will permit me to accept such a princely wage."

McIlvaine's handsome, smooth-shaven face lighted up, and he exhaled a deep breath of relief.

"Thank goodness!" he exclaimed. "I'm mighty glad it turned out that way, Bob. I've been doing some intensive cogitating since you left here to go after that position, and—I've been worrying that you might accept it before I had a chance to dissuade you.

"You see," he went on, "I've about come to the conclusion that—er—that there might be a better way of solving our problem than the plan you suggested. It does seem such a pity that the firm of Pembroke and McIlvaine should be split up."

"Of course it's a pity," I acquiesced, his emotion striking a responsive chord within me. "But what else is there to be done, old man? That hundred per cent boost in our office rent was the last straw. Deduct that staggering increase in our expenses from our total income and, even with the annual retainer from the Westland people thrown in, there won't be enough left to provide more than one of us with a moderate living. It's a clear case of united we fall, divided we stand. One of us has got to get out and give the other a chance to collect enough from the business to keep out of the breadline. I thought I had you thoroughly convinced this morning, Marvin, that it was the only way."

"You did have me pretty well convinced then," he responded, smiling. "Much as I hated the idea of our parting company, I let you persuade me to flip a coin to decide which one of us should go after that job because, at the time, it looked like the only, or, at all events the most practical, solution of our problem. But—as I say—I've been doing some deep thinking since you left, Bob, and—I believe I've hit on a better plan."

"A better plan!" I echoed. "One that will make it unnecessary for us to break up the partnership? Let's hear it."

The eagerness in my voice was a sincere indication of my reluctance to sever my professional relationship with Marvin McIlvaine if the step could possibly be avoided. We had been chums at college and at law school. We had fought side by side in the Argonne Forest. We had been law partners ever since our admission to the bar. On that day we had gripped hands

and registered a mutual vow that we would climb the ladder of success together and that nothing but the death of one of its members should be permitted to tear asunder the firm of Pembroke and McIlvaine.

With the usual sublime confidence of youth in general, and young men about to enter the profession of law in particular, the possibility of the combination failing to yield a livelihood for both of us had not entered our minds. And, as a matter of fact, we met with such an encouraging degree of success at the start that if we had entertained any such apprehensions they would have been dispelled long before the arrival of the first anniversary of our partnership. I don't mean to say that we were making a fortune by that time, but we had managed to get enough business to pay the rent of the furnished room we shared together and to provide us with food, shelter, and cigarette money, after our office expenses had been defrayed.

For the next four years we had continued to prosper, doing a little better each succeeding year until eventually we had a nice little balance in the bank and were beginning to think of moving into a larger office and hiring a stenographer who knew how to spell. But before we had a chance to carry out these plans there came a Presidential proclamation announcing that Uncle Sam was about to roll up his shirt-sleeves and participate in a little cleaning-up job on the other side of the Atlantic. So my partner and I mailed a nicely engraved card to each of our clients calling attention to the fact that as both members of the firm were called abroad on pressing business the law offices of Pembroke & McIlvaine would remain closed until further notice.

When we returned to New York, after the signing of the armistice, we had an idea that we were about to resume our law practise at the point where he had left it when we enlisted. But we soon discovered our mistake. Three of our best clients had been forced out of business by the commercial vicissitudes the war had brought about; four more were dead; another had fled to Mexico to escape the draft; and the greater part of the remainder were evidently well satisfied with the relations they had established with other attorneys during our absence, for they did not come back to us or take any notice of the dignified announcement we sent them informing them where our new offices were located. It was practically a case of beginning all over again. And this time we seemed to be out of luck; for, somehow, we did not meet with the smooth sailing which had attended our initial venture.

True, we had succeeded in making one profitable connection since our discharge from the Army. Over in France we had become rather chummy with a Y. M. C. A. worker who was the son of the president of the Westland Vacuum Cleaner Company. We had met this chap again in New York and through his influence had been given a yearly retainer to handle the legal work of the collection department of his father's business. As most of the machines were sold on the instalment plan there was a lot of petty litigation to be done in connection with this department, and, although, it was not very ambitious work, it brought a big enough fee to defray all our office expenses, including the salary of Miss Dorothy Boynton, our stenographer.

But, after doing us this one good turn, Fortune had ceased to smile on us. Our shingle had been out now for more than twelve months since our resumption of "civvies," and our other clients were so few that we could count them on one hand without overworking any of our fingers. Moreover, their total business was not remunerative enough to provide both members of the firm with an adequate drawing account.

Hence the present crisis in our affairs which had impelled me to suggest that we toss a coin to determine which one of us should go out and hunt a job so as to relieve the strain on the firm's financial resources.

If my partner had a better plan, however, as he said, nothing could suit me better. For—to be quite frank—it was not only my devotion to him which made me reluctant to detach myself from active partnership in the firm of Pembroke & McIlvaine. There was another reason.

Her name, as I have already disclosed, was Dorothy Boynton. I may be prejudiced, but it is my honest belief that she was without exception the most competent stenographer to be found in any law office in New York. In the six months she had been working for us we had never once caught a mistake in spelling in her letters or legal forms. Even her punctuation was perfect. She never used an eraser, or had to do a page over twice, notwithstanding the fact that her slender, nimble fingers always moved over the typewriter keys at top speed. And her shorthand was as infallible as her typing.

But it was none of these things which made it so difficult for me to repress a groan when the coin which McIlvaine had tossed in the air had come down heads, bringing with it the decree of the fates that I should henceforth surrender the privilege of dictating to our blond-haired, blue-eyed employee. She might have been one-tenth as proficient for all I would have cared. It was the charm her radiant presence imparted to our office which had caused me secretly to envy my partner, his good fortune in being the surviving member of the firm, and which made me so eager now to hear this new scheme of his which might render it unnecessary for me to withdraw.

"What's your idea, old scout?" I inquired, as he hesitated. "Believe me, if you've really thought out a practical way of—er—continuing the partnership, without both of us starving, I'm for it heart and soul, whatever it is."

I felt like a hypocrite at the glow my words brought to his eyes.

"You'd be for it, whatever it was, eh?" he exclaimed, eagerly. "You really mean that, Bob? You wouldn't veto the plan just because it was unconventional?"

"Certainly not," I assured him recklessly. "If it would only do the trick I wouldn't care what—"

"It would do the trick all right. I am quite sure of that. It would bring us in enough extra kale to keep the old ship afloat without either of us having to get off the bridge, and—it would be honest money.

"You see," he went on, still beating about the bush as though he were afraid to spring his inspiration on me without adequate preparation, "the trouble with your own plan, Bob, is that you couldn't take a job with another law office and retain your connection here, even as a silent partner. No employer in the profession would stand for such an arrangement, of course. They'd expect and demand your undivided loyalty. But if one of us went into another business altogether—took up a line of work entirely foreign from the law—it would be different. There wouldn't be any difficulty then."

"I begin to understand," I said, nodding. "Your idea is for me to take on some job on the side which wouldn't conflict or interfere with my work here. So far, so good. If it paid well enough there might be something in that suggestion—especially if the extra job could be attended to in my spare time. The trouble is, though, what could I do that would bring in some real money? I don't know anything else but the law. All my training, as you know, has been along legal lines. If you could suggest any other way in which I might be able to capitalize whatever brain power I possess—"

"I don't know about your brain power," he cut in, smiling. "But you have a strong pair of arms, old man. It ought to be possible to capitalize your brawn, if not your brains. In these extraordinary times, when a street-car motorman gets better pay than a college professor, and—"

"A motorman!" I exclaimed, sharply. "Great Scott! Are you—do you expect me to run a street-car as a means of bringing in some extra revenue to the treasury of Pembroke & McIlvaine? Is that the sweet, little job you've picked out for me?"

"Not at all. I merely cited the case of the motorman as an illustration of the fact that to-day Manual Labor is king." He paused. "A motorman, I understand, receives eighty cents an hour. That, of course, is considerably more than a good many men in our profession make, but—the job I have in mind pays even better."

"What is it?" I asked, frowning.

"Window-cleaning," was his laconic response.

"Window-cleaning!" I echoed, staring at him in astonishment. "You're not—you can't be serious!"

My partner assured me that he was thoroughly in earnest.

"I've been doing some figuring," he said, picking up a sheet of paper filled with numerals from his desk. "I have come to the conclusion that there is a small fortune in it. Please don't interrupt for a minute, old man. Let me have my say," He smiled whimsically. "I quite expected that you would go up in the air when the scheme was first sprung on you, but I feel confident that I can convince you that it is a thoroughly practical and satisfactory way out of our difficulties.

"You remember that little Italian we met the other day, Bob?" he continued. "The chap who used to wait on us at Paletti's, and who told us that he was making more money now than he had ever made in his life—by washing apartment-house windows. Fifteen cents a window, he said he charged them, and his services were in such demand that he couldn't take care of all his customers. You remember that, don't you?"

"Yes; of course I remember it, but—"

"Fifteen cents a window!" McIlvaine repeated, without giving me a chance to finish. "Just think of it! And after a little practise it couldn't possibly take more than five minutes to do a window. Fifteen cents for five minutes' work. That's one dollar and eighty cents per hour—fourteen dollars and forty cents per day. And only half an hour ago Berger, Underwood & Berger offered you thirty dollars per week to take charge of their corporation, surrogate's, real estate and trial work!"

"But—" I began again.

"Don't you see what a profitable venture it would be?" he went on, quickly. "And the beauty of the plan is that it wouldn't interfere with this business. The firm of Pembroke & McIlvaine would remain intact. Of course one partner would have to attend to all the work here in the office while the other was out on his route, but we could get together evenings and—"

"Have you thought of the prestige it would give to the firm if I happened to encounter one of our clients on the street while I was hurrying along with my little pail and step-ladder?" I managed to break in, with withering sarcasm. "Leaving aside my own feelings in the matter, Marvin—which, of course, aren't to be considered—do you imagine it would make a great hit with the Westland Vacuum Cleaner Company, for instance, if they should happen to learn that one of their legal representatives was applying his knowledge of Blackstone and Kent to the polishing of window-panes? How long do you suppose we should continue to have their business after they made that pleasant little discovery?"

"They wouldn't know," he argued. "We should take pains, of course, to keep the thing secret. I'm no snob, but I realize that the dignity of the profession has got to be maintained. It might even be necessary to resort to some sort of disguise. I dare say that could be managed easily enough."

"I'm no snob either," I shot back angrily. "But, hang it all, man! There are some things at which I draw the line, and this is one of them. This nice little job you've picked out for me, doesn't quite appeal—"

"I haven't exactly picked it out for you," he interrupted, emphasizing the last pronoun. "We shall draw lots, of course, to decide which one of us remains here and which one goes out to clean windows. That's only fair."

"But we have already tossed up—and I lost," I said, somewhat mollified by his explanation.

"That doesn't count," McIlvaine rejoined. "This is an entirely new arrangement, and it is only just that we should take equal chances. I'll not pretend that the loser is going to have the pleasant end of the bargain, but—after all, it will be honest labor, and it will make it possible for us to continue in business together. To me that is worth any personal sacrifice. He took a ten-cent piece from his pocket. "If you're willing, old scout, we'll decide the thing right now."

I hesitated for a moment; then shrugged my shoulders.

"All right," I assented. "I'm on. I'll take heads."

He spun the coin on the flat of his desk. It came down with the young lady's classic profile uppermost, and I exhaled a deep breath of relief.

My partner grinned good-humoredly. "That settles it," he remarked. "I shall start out to-morrow morning on my new profession. If you have any friends, Mr. Pembroke, whose windows need attention you might be kind enough to say a good word for me."

I made one attempt to dissuade him. "It's madness!" I protested. "Sheer folly! See here, Marvin, why not drop this fool idea and let me take a job in another law office, as we first agreed? My plan may have its disadvantages, but at least it's a sane one. For the love of Mehetabeel, old man, listen to reason!"

He shook his head. "The die is cast!" he declared, with mock tragedy. Then he glanced toward the door which communicated with the outer office, and his face suddenly became grave.

"There's one thing, though," he said in an undertone. "Miss Boynton isn't to learn a word about—about what I'm doing. You understand that fully, of course? You'll have to find some plausible explanation to account for my spending so much time outside the office. Perhaps it may be possible to make her believe that I am in court. At all events not in any circumstances is she to be permitted to suspect the truth. You'll promise me that, Bob?"

It was not until that moment, strange to say, that the thought had ever entered my mind that I might not be the only member of the firm whose interest in our attractive stenographer was more than merely professional.

II.

WHATEVER objections there might be to my partner's sensational project, there is no denying that it was a pronounced success from a financial standpoint. The very first day he made twelve dollars, which, considering that he was a novice at the art of window-washing, was doing pretty well I had to admit. The second day he had increased his earnings to fourteen dollars, and by the end of his first week at his new occupation he was averaging between fifteen and twenty dollars per day.

"It's the easiest money I ever made in my life," he told me, with a chuckle. "Now that I've thoroughly got my hand in, I can get a whole window done in less than five minutes, and I've got my route so systematized that I lose very little time in getting from customer to customer."

"How do you get your customers?" I asked him, curiously.

"By personal solicitation mostly. That is to say, I started in that way. Just went from apartment to apartment, you know, and asked the good housewives if they wanted their windows washed. If they hadn't already made arrangements with one of my competitors they welcomed me like a prodigal son. With servant girls not to be had at any price, and washerwomen charging four dollars per day and refusing to do anything else but the family wash, they were mighty glad to avail themselves of my offer to let daylight into their homes. And they were eager to make an arrangement with me, too, to come every week. I've got pretty nearly enough steady engagements now to keep me busy, and shan't have to spend much time drumming up new trade."

"You confine your operations to apartments and homes, of course?" I inquired anxiously. "You don't go near any business places?"

"Not many. Most of my customers are private families, but I have a few stores, too, on my list—and a couple of office-buildings."

"Office buildings!" I echoed, in alarm. "Great Scott! You don't mean to say that you are indiscreet enough to venture into the offices of business men? Why, you might be recognized by one of our clients, or—"

"No danger of that," he cut me short, with a confident laugh. "You ought to see me in my working togs. I don't believe you'd be able to identify me yourself if you met me face to face. As an extra precaution I stain my classic countenance with an olive tint, speak broken English during

business hours, and call myself ' Tony Guffanti.' Don't worry, old-timer. As I told you the other day, I am fully alive to the vital necessity of maintaining the dignity of the eminent legal firm of Pembroke & McIlvaine, and am most careful not to take any unnecessary chances."

I was somewhat reassured; and when three weeks had sped by without anything startling occurring to disturb the new order of things, I began to lose my sense of foreboding that no good was to come of this erratic idea of my partner's. Gradually, in fact, I came to agree with him that he had hit on a very practical and satisfactory solution of our problem.

Every evening McIlvaine came down to the office—clad, of course, in his normal attire, with all traces of his window-washing activities carefully removed—and conferred with me regarding the progress of our legal work. During the daytime he, naturally, never put in an appearance, and I had to explain to such of our callers as inquired about him that he was engaged on some important outside business. That was easy enough—for fortunately there was none of our clients who had any particular reason for insisting on dealing personally with my partner. It made no difference to them which member of the firm attended to their cases.

Miss Boynton, our stenographer, might have proved a more difficult proposition. To have lied to that girl outright would, of course, have been out of the question, and I expected to have rather an embarrassing time of it accounting to her for the continued absence from the office of the other half of the firm. As it happened, however, my apprehensions proved groundless; for she was taken ill on the very day that McIlvaine started out on his window-cleaning enterprise, and she did not come down to the office at all for the next few weeks. She was suffering from an attack of nervous prostration, according to the sharp-featured young woman whom she sent to serve as her substitute, and her physician had ordered a complete rest.

One afternoon, as I was dictating a summons and complaint in one of our vacuum cleaner cases to the above-mentioned young lady, and inwardly making some unfavorable comparisons between her and the charming girl whose place she was filling—more or less—I was surprised by the sudden entry of McIlvaine.

To say that I was surprised is putting it rather mildly. Not only was his presence there at that hour of the day unusual, but his face was pale and haggard, and his manner obviously agitated. He kept pacing nervously up and down the room while, at his suggestion, I continued dictating, and I observed that he was making a desperate effort to regain his normal poise.

" Anything wrong, old man?" I asked, presently, after Miss Boynton's substitute had gone out to her machine.

" Wrong!" he almost snapped at me. " Certainly not. Why should you imagine that?"

" Well, seeing you down here, in your best clothes, at this early hour in the afternoon, I naturally thought—"

" Oh that!" he interrupted. " I sprained my hand, and had to quit window-cleaning for a while. That's a good enough reason, isn't it?"

" Of course," I assented, marveling more and more at his strange manner. " Bad sprain, old man?"

" Not particularly. But bad enough to compel me to take an afternoon off. It's my right hand, and I can't afford to abuse it." He paused. " Anything stirring down here? I thought I might as well come down and give you the benefit of my sage counsel."

More like his customary self now, he seated himself beside my desk, and began to take over office matters with me. Presently, as we discussed some impending litigation, he picked up a pencil to make a note on my memorandum pad. This simple act of his gave me a bit of a shock. He was writing with his sprained hand.

It was evident that he had lied to me. It was equally evident that his usually keen legal mind was not functioning normally. He was making a desperate effort to appear interested in the business we were discussing, but obviously his wits were wandering.

Finally he got up. " Guess I'll go down-

stairs and get an evening paper," he muttered. "Rather anxious to see how—er—how the stock market is going.'

That last remark of his caused the thought to come to my mind that his mysterious agitation might be due to some speculating he had been doing in Wall Street. But when he returned a little later with the latest editions of six different evening papers I promptly discarded that theory. Looking over his shoulder as he read, I discovered that the item of news which seemed to hold his attention had nothing to do with the financial situation. It was the report of a tragedy that had occurred shortly before noon that day—the murder of an insurance broker in an uptown office-building.

His anxious gaze roved from paper to paper, scanning the report of the same case in each, as though he expected that one might give him a little more information than the others. I watched him furtively as he was thus occupied, and observed that his face was a mirror of conflicting emotions. Anxiety, hope, astonishment, consternation, and relief, each appeared there in turn, if I was any judge of facial expressions.

Presently he turned to me. "Heard about the shooting in the Brixton Building?" he asked, abruptly.

"I heard two men talking about it in the elevator as I came up from lunch," I told him. "Anything particularly interesting about the case?"

He handed me one of the papers, and I perused the headlines of the story carefully:

BROKER SHOT DEAD IN OFFICE

Justin R. Hollender, Wealthy Insurance Man, Slain at Own Desk, on Sixth Floor of Brixton Building

Clerk Arrested, Charged With Murder

Police Claim to have Conclusive Evidence Against Seymour Nyles, Dead Man's Confidential Employee

"Anything particularly interesting about the case?" I asked my partner again, before I turned my attention to the half column or so of double-leaded, smaller type which followed. "Don't happen to know either of the principals, do you?"

"No; I don't know either of them; but I think—I have a hunch that the police have got that clerk wrong. He didn't do it."

"What makes you suppose that? According to the paper, here, the evidence against the fellow is conclusive."

"Bah! You can't believe all you see in the papers," he rejoined, irritably. "I tell you I know—er—I feel sure that he is innocent."

I tried to get him to explain his faith in the accused man, and the astonishing degree of interest he seemed to be taking in an affair which, so far as I could see, presented no features out of the ordinary, but he refused to take me into his confidence. Instead he quickly changed the subject, and did not refer to the murder in the Brixton Building again, for the remainder of the day.

At eleven o'clock the next morning, however, he came into the office, a gleam of excitement in his eyes.

"We've got a new client," he announced.

"Good work, old man! Who is he, and how did we get him?"

"His name is Seymour Nyles," he explained. "He—"

"Nyles!" I interrupted sharply. "You mean the fellow charged with the murder of that insurance broker? You've taken up his case, Marvin?"

McIlvaine nodded. "Yes; we're going to defend him," he declared. "I've just come from the Tombs, where I had an interview with him. He is poor and friendless, and was mighty glad to avail himself of our offer to look out for his interests.

"It's a big opportunity for us, Bob," he went on. "There'll be no money in it, of course. The unfortunate chap can't even pay a retaining fee. But it will be the biggest criminal case we have ever handled, and if we succeed in getting him off it will give us a reputation that ought to bring us a lot of business along those lines."

I frowned dubiously. I had been reading about the Brixton Building case in the morning paper, which contained a much

more detailed account of the affair than had appeared in the evening editions of the day before. So far as I could deduce from the facts presented, the accused clerk did not have a hundred to one chance of escaping the electric chair.

I said as much to my partner.

"If we succeed in getting him off!" I sneered. "Of course that's very likely. The man was practically caught in the act. Although there don't seem to have been any witnesses to the actual shooting, the circumstantial evidence is dead against him. He was alone in the office with his employer when the shot was fired. A box of cartridges which fitted the automatic found beside the body was discovered in a drawer of Nyles's desk. He admits that the cartridges belonged to him, although denying ownership of the gun.

"Moreover, the police seem to have definitely established a pretty strong motive. It is known that there was bad blood between the clerk and the dead man—that Nyles was to have been discharged at the end of the week, after working there for fifteen years. He admits, himself, that he and his employer had quarreled only an hour before the murder, and that Hollender had given him his walking papers." I laughed ironically. "Frankly, Marvin, I don't exactly see a gloriously opportunity for us in identifying ourselves with a case of that sort. Even if there was any money in it—which you say there isn't—it seems to me that we should be burning our fingers by touching—"

"Money!" he broke in, indignantly. "Is that all you think of? Hang it, Bob! If you must know, there is— I've got a special reason for coming to the rescue of that poor devil. He's innocent, and he's not going to be railroaded to the chair, if we can prevent it."

"A special reason, eh!" I exclaimed, eagerly. "That's entirely different, of course, old fellow. If this chap, Nyles, is a friend of yours—" I stopped short, with a smile that invited his confidence.

McIlvaine hesitated for a moment. It was evident that a sharp mental struggle was going on within him. Presently he nodded.

"Yes; that's it," he said, with a peculiar inflection. "He's an old friend of mine. Now you understand why we're taking up his case, don't you?"

"But you told me yesterday that you did not know him."

"I don't—er—I think you must have misunderstood me."

Puzzled though I was by his attitude, I let it go at that. Considering the years of our friendship I was naturally hurt that he did not see fit to be more open with me, but my pride made me averse to trying to force his secret out of him.

Later that day, at McIlvaine's suggestion, I visited the Tombs prison to interview our new client. The talk that I had with him in the counsel room did not stimulate my enthusiasm over the prospects of winning the case. In fact, I came away more convinced than ever that we were taking up a lost cause.

Seymour Nyles was a shriveled, pasty-faced, unprepossessing little man on the shady side of forty. He seemed to be on the verge of a nervous collapse, and there was something about his appearance which caused me to suspect that he was an addict of the drug habit. His personality alone would have been sufficient, I thought, to cause the average juryman to decide that he was guilty, even if the evidence against him had been one tenth as damning.

In a thin, quavering voice that did not carry conviction, he protested his innocence to me. He was not in the office at the time his employer was shot, he insisted. He had sneaked out to go to a pool-room in the neighborhood to place a bet on a horse-race. When he returned he discovered the tragedy, and gave the alarm.

He swore to me that he had never before seen the weapon with which the murder was committed. He had owned a gun once —hence the box of cartridges in his desk— but he had sold it to a man a few days ago. He couldn't recall the name of this man or tell me where he was to be found.

Yes; it was true that he had quarreled with his boss that very day, over the latter's refusal to raise his salary, and had been told to get out by the end of the week; but it was not true that he had become so furi-

ous over the loss of his job that he had put a bullet into Hollender. On his word of honor he didn't do it. Somebody must have entered the office and committed the murder during the few minutes that he was away from his desk, visiting the pool-room.

As I reflected over this interview, on my way back to my office, I asked myself, wonderingly, what reason my partner could possibly have for believing the fellow's improbable story. Now that I had seen and spoken with the man, McIlvaine's mysterious interest in him perplexed me more than ever.

A possible answer to the question came to me the next day in a startling form. I was in conference with Marvin—who had not gone back to his window-washing, although I could detect no signs of his hand being sprained—when Miss Hodgins, our stenographer, entered the room to announce a visitor.

"He's a Mr. Davidson," the young woman explained. "He says that you don't know him, but that he has some important information to give you concerning the Brixton Building murder case."

"Show him right in," I said, eagerly.

The visitor, a middle-aged man of prosperous appearance, told us that he was in the export and import business and had a suite of offices on the sixth floor of the Brixton Building.

"My private office is right next door to the office of that chap who was murdered," he continued. "Our windows, you understand, are side by side. That is why I am inclined to think that the incident I have come to tell you about may have some bearing on the case.

"At half past eleven, last Tuesday morning—the day and hour of the murder—I was seated at my desk, with my back to the window, when I heard a sound behind me. I turned quickly and was startled to find that a rough-looking fellow in overalls was in the act of raising my window-sash and letting himself into my office.

"I thought he was going to hold me up, at first, but before I could make any outcry he had apologized for the intrusion, explaining that he was a window-washer and had come to clean my window.

"The man was so excited," said Mr. Davidson, "and his manner so queer, that I was not entirely satisfied by his explanation. I asked him where his pail and other implements were, and he gave me some incoherent response about having left them down-stairs, and said that he would go down and get them. Before I could make a move to prevent him, he was hurrying out of the room, by way of the door—and that was the last I saw of him. He did not come back to clean my window, as he had promised. And later I discovered his pail and rags outside on my fire escape, so evidently he was lying when he said that he had left them down-stairs, and had merely told me that as an excuse for making his getaway.

"I didn't attach a great deal of importance to the incident at the time," our visitor concluded. "I was too busy to give much thought to it. But later, when I heard about the murder next door, I began to put two and two together. I went to the police and suggested to them that, inasmuch as the fellow had evidently come across the fire-escape from Hollender's office, there was a possibility that the window-washer was the murderer, and that the man they had arrested for the crime was really innocent. They laughed at me, and seemed to resent my butting in, so I thought I would come to you gentlemen and tell you my story. I saw in the newspaper this morning that you had been retained by that unfortunate clerk as his counsel, and I said to myself that you would be mighty glad to hear about my experience."

There followed a long pause. It was broken by McIlvaine, whose face had turned rather pale during this recital, I thought.

"What you have told us is indeed very interesting, Mr. Davidson," my partner said. "Your testimony ought to prove exceedingly helpful to our client, when repeated on the witness-stand." Then, after a brief hesitation: Could you give us a description of this mysterious window-washer—tell us what he looked like?"

Our visitor nodded.

"His face was very dark," he responded. "He looked to me like a foreigner—an Italian, I believe. And he was about your

own build, I should say. In fact, sir, if you won't be offended at my saying so, he resembled you somewhat. Except for the difference in complexion, and his lack of refinement, he looked a great deal like you in face, as well as in figure."

"Comparisons are odious," quote McIlvaine, with a laugh that was obviously forced. "What became of the pail and other stuff, which you found on your window-sill?"

"They are at police headquarters I believe. Although they sneered at my story the police went to the trouble of sending for them."

"We shall have to replevin them," said my partner. "They are likely to prove important exhibits for the defense."

And after Davidson had gone he turned to me with a grim smile.

"What do you think of this new evidence?" he asked. "Looks as though we might be able to do something with it, eh?"

"It looks pretty good," I agreed. "If we can succeed in finding that window-cleaner, before—"

"Find him!" he interrupted, sharply. "What do we have to do that for? We shan't even go to the trouble of looking for him. I—er—that isn't necessary. Let the police hunt for him, if they want. It's their work. Davidson's testimony will be quite sufficient to establish a reasonable doubt in the minds of the jury."

He went out presently, and after he had gone I made a startling discovery which seemed to confirm an unpleasant suspicion which had recently been taking shape in my mind. On the floor, near his desk, I picked up a pocket memorandum book which contained a list of his window-cleaning engagements.

On one of the pages of the book I found the following significant entry:

"Brixton Building—Mr. Wendell, Superintendent—Tuesdays."

"Good Lord!" I ejaculated, in tones of horror.

III.

I said nothing to McIlvaine about my discovery. On the contrary I did my utmost to hide from him the fact that I knew his secret. I did not want his confidence now. The last thing I wished for was for him to come to me, man-to-man fashion, and make a clean breast of his guilt.

For no matter what he had done, he was my friend, and I could not betray him. But, on the other hand, as a member of the bar, I was an officer of the court, sworn to uphold the law and to see that justice was served. How could I remain silent and let an innocent man—my own client—suffer for another's crime? So long as I did not know for sure—so long as I had only my suspicions that Marvin McIlvaine was responsible for the murder in the Brixton Building, I could juggle with my conscience; but once I had heard the terrible truth from his own lips I should be compelled to make a choice between friendship and duty.

So my great fear now was that he might take it into his head to tell me his awful secret. But I need not have feared. As day after day went by, it became more and more evident that he intended to keep from me, if possible, the identity of the mysterious window-cleaner who had made his escape from the scene of the crime via Davidson's window.

I could see that he was suffering greatly, however. Each day his face grew more strained and haggard, and it seemed to me that he was losing flesh. When the case of the People of the State of New York against Seymour Nyles was called to trial, a few weeks later, he was in such a pitiful state of anxiety that my heart ached for him. He pretended to be confident that we were bound to win, but I knew that he was not nearly so sanguine as he strove to appear, and I guessed that his conscience was struggling with the problem of what he was going to do if the verdict should be guilty.

"Of course the result is bound to be an acquittal," he said to me, with a wistful smile, as we started out for court. "I am not even willing to concede that there is a chance of the jury disagreeing. Considering the strong case we have, that's not possible."

"Suppose we—er—should be disappointed? Suppose things should go against us? What do you intend— I mean what are we going to do then?"

"Do!" he answered, scowling. "Appeal, of course. We'll carry the case to the United States Supreme Court if necessary."

"That would be rather expensive," I remarked. "And if the case should be lost on appeal—what then?"

He was silent for a moment, and I observed from the play of his facial muscles that a bitter struggle was going on within him.

"If that happens," he answered presently, in a strained voice, "I suppose we shall have to—to let things take their course. Hang it all, Bob! What fool questions you do ask! What else would there be left for us to do? We shall have done our best for Nyles. We couldn't possibly do any more."

So, if the worst came to the worst, I thought to myself, bitterly, he was determined to sacrifice our client to save his own neck. I could hardly believe it of him. That Marvin McIlvaine was a coward seemed to me almost incredible.

I quaked inwardly as I pictured my own terrible predicament if things should come to this critical pass. As we entered the court-room I was breathing a fervent prayer that the verdict of the twelve good men, and true, in the jury-box might save both me and my partner from having to face such a painful test.

As the trial proceeded, however, my hopes steadily sank. The district attorney, we found, had unearthed some new evidence against our client. An examination of the books of the victim of the shooting had brought to light the fact that the accused clerk was short several thousand dollars in his accounts. Not only did this revelation supply an additional motive for the murder—the fear that after he lost his job the truth about his speculations was sure to come out—but it produced an unfavorable effect on the jury by blackening the defendant's character. When the State's evidence was all in, even McIlvaine was obliged to admit that they had made out an unpleasantly strong case.

We did the best we could with the material at our disposal. We had succeeded in finding several witnesses to corroborate Davidson's story about the mysterious window-cleaner. Three tenants of an office-building which stood back of the Brixton took the stand and testified that at about the time of the murder they had seen a man in overalls emerge from the window of the dead man's office and enter the window of the office adjoining. Wendell, the superintendent of the Brixton Building, bore witness that an "Italian" whom he employed to wash windows every Tuesday had been at work on the sixth floor that fatal morning. And we offered as exhibits the pail and wash-pads which Davidson had found on his fire-escape, and which he had compelled the police to produce in court.

But, anxiously scanning the faces of the twelve men in the box, it seemed to me that they were not greatly impressed by this testimony. And when we put the defendant himself on the stand—which we dared not refuse to do—he made such a wretched showing under cross-examination that I felt sure he had more than nullified whatever good effect our other witnesses had produced.

Both my partner and I left court that evening in an exceedingly dejected frame of mind. All the evidence was in. There remained only the summing up and the judge's charge to the jury. To-morrow the case would be finished, and only a miracle, I told myself, could save our client from the electric chair—unless McIlvaine, or I, decided to speak the words which would exonerate him, and put my partner there in his place.

"Looks pretty bad, eh, Marvin?" I remarked, grimly, as we entered our office.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered, with a show of confidence which was belied by his gloomy countenance. "The verdict isn't in yet. You never can tell about juries."

"One doesn't have to be much of a prophet to predict what this jury is going to do," I rejoined, pessimistically.

He shrugged his shoulders. "We'll wait and see," he said gruffly. "At all events, we've done the best we could—so what's the use of worrying?"

"The best we could!" I repeated, bitterly, suddenly losing my self-control. "Are you sure of that?"

He started, and looked at me uneasily.

"What do you mean?" he faltered.

"Are you quite certain that you—that neither of us could have done more to save poor Nyles—if he had been willing?"

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "So you know—do you?"

"Yes; I know," I answered, sadly. "I didn't mean to let it out; but—somehow I felt just now as though I couldn't keep it to myself any longer. You needn't be afraid, Marvin. So far as I am concerned your wretched secret is safe. But, ever since that day that Davidson came here I have been aware of the identity of the man who came through this window."

He laughed sardonically. "Well, go on," he said. "That isn't all, is it? You have found out that I was on the scene at the time of the shooting. What else?"

"The rest I can guess. I would give my right hand to be able to think that I am wrong, but from your subsequent behavior I am compelled to believe that it was you who—"

I did not finish the sentence. At that moment the door of our private office flew open, and Dorothy Boynton staggered into the room. Her face was white and drawn, her eyes wild and pre-naturally bright. As she sank into a chair both McIlvaine and I gazed at her commiseratingly. It was evident at a glance that she was on the verge of collapse.

"Miss Boynton," I began, "what on earth—"

"I had to come," she gasped. "I was in court this afternoon, and I—I followed you here. I can't stand the suspense any longer. I can't wait for the jury to bring in a verdict. Whether they pronounce him innocent or guilty, I must tell. It was I who killed Hollender! I have come to—to give myself up, Mr. Pembroke."

"You!" I exclaimed, incredulously. "You don't realize what you are saying, little girl. If you will let me get a cab and take you home, we—"

"No! No!" she interrupted me, wildly. "I won't go home until—until you have heard my confession. It was I who killed him. You must believe that. Ask Mr. McIlvaine. He was there and saw me do it. He advised me to go away, and say nothing about it, but I—I can't keep quiet any longer."

Still incredulous, I glanced inquiringly toward my partner.

"It's true," he said gruffly. "I suppose you might as well hear the whole business now. I was in there, cleaning the window of Hollender's private office, when she came in, and began to blaze away at him almost immediately. I tried to stay her hand, but there wasn't time.

"Then I did some quick thinking, and contrived a little ruse which I hoped might draw suspicion from her. Without stopping to ask any questions I persuaded her to make her escape through the door of Hollender's room which opened into the hall. Then I went back and beat it out of the window and across the fire-escape into the window of Davidson's office. I wanted him to notice me, of course. The idea was to have him come forward later and tell about the mysterious window-cleaner who, I hoped, would be blamed for the shooting. Unfortunately I did not figure on the possibility of the clerk being accused. That presented a complication I had not foreseen. Otherwise the plan would have gone through according to schedule.

"The fellow, I understand, had another business besides insurance," McIlvaine explained. "Blackmail was his side-line." He glanced pityingly at the girl. "This little lady, as she has since informed me, had the misfortune to get into his clutches some time ago, and he had driven her half crazy with his extortions and threats. He had some letters of hers which he threatened to send to the family of the young physician she is engaged to marry, and—"

"Engaged to be married to a physician!" I cut in, blankly.

"Yes," said my partner, with a sad smile. "And we had better lose no time in getting her under his care now. It is evident that she is in urgent need of his professional services. If you will telephone for that cab you were speaking of, Bob, we will ride up-town with Miss Boynton together."

"But I must dictate a confession first," the girl cried, hysterically. "I must free myself of my terrible secret. I can't keep quiet a minute longer, Mr. McIlvaine. I

know you meant to give me good advice, but I can't follow it. I can't."

"You can dictate the confession in the cab, on our way up-town," my partner told her, soothingly. "Try to pull yourself together, little lady. Everything will come out all right."

IV.

Some of the newspapermen who heard Marvin McIlvaine sum up for the defense the next day in the case of the People of the State of New York against Seymour Nyles, pronounced his effort the most masterly closing speech they had ever heard in a criminal court. Even the district attorney later congratulated him on it.

He spoke for a solid hour, and the major part of that time he devoted to the subject of the mysterious window-washer who had been seen leaving Hollender's office at the time of the shooting.

Who was that man? he demanded of the jury, in ringing tones? Who was he, and *where* was he? Why had the police, with all their resources, been unsuccessful in locating him? What had become of him? Was not his failure to come forward a clear indication that he was guilty of the murder? Is not flight, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a plain confession of guilt?

At all events, the intelligent gentlemen in the jury box must realize that while this unknown washer of windows remained undiscovered they could not conscientiously convict his client. The prisoner at the bar was entitled to the benefit of a reasonable doubt. That was the law, as the learned judge on the bench would instruct them. And inasmuch as the window-cleaner had not been produced in court by the prosecution, there must exist a reasonable doubt as to the guilt of the defendant in the mind of every fair-minded man.

He did not wish to criticize the district attorney. He had a sincere admiration for the personal qualities of his learned opponent. But he could not help thinking that if the prosecutor's office had devoted one half the zeal to hunting for the miscreant window-washer that it had expended in trying to railroad an innocent man to the electric chair, the real murderer of the unfortunate Justin R. Hollender would be in the prisoner's dock at that moment, etc., etc.

The jury was out less than fifteen minutes. They brought in a verdict of not guilty.

"Most of us were satisfied at first that your client did it," the foreman explained to us, after court had adjoined. "He looks like a bad one. But after we had heard Mr. McIlvaine's speech we all came to the conclusion that the window-washer must be the guilty party. He made that perfectly clear to us."

It is several months ago since we won that case. Since then, and as a direct result of our success in that instance, we have been retained in so many other big criminal cases that the firm of Pembroke & McIlvaine is now on the high road to prosperity.

The sharp-featured young woman is still pegging away at the keys of our typewriter. Miss Boynton, her predecessor, never came back. A few weeks ago, after a long sojourn in a sanatorium, she married the young physician, who is one of the very few persons who know the real facts of the Brixton Building shooting affair.

The metropolitan police are not among those who share that knowledge. They are now firmly of the opinion that the fugitive window-washer was the man they should have arrested and charged with the murder, in the first place. Ever since the trial they have been conducting a diligent hunt for him.

My partner and I are hoping that they will not be successful.

Claimed

by Francis Stevens

Author of "Avalon," "Citadel of Fear," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

AN oblong, bluish-green box, about a dozen inches long, by half as many wide, highly polished, its sole decoration a single short line of archaic characters—this was the dread talisman sold by Jacob Lutz, curio dealer, to Jesse Robinson, millionaire engine-builder, and which drew into the wood of its strange and sinister influence Leilah Robinson, the old man's niece, and Dr. Vanaman, whom the millionaire had retained as much as his guard as physician following the Green Invasion.

Vanaman did not know what to believe; he knew only that the old man guarded the box from some individual, or, rather, Thing, which sought it—and the curious, dread phenomenon of the first night, afterward repeated, filled Vanaman with doubt and unexplainable fear. And the manner of it had been this: first, a hissing, stronger and stronger, and then a green line under the door, edged with a pale foam and out of this damp greenness, rising higher and higher, a dreadful Shape—until—the spell was broken by his will; at his shout and upward leap all was as it had been before.

A dream—perhaps; psychometry—maybe. But Vanaman confessed that his hold on the material was slipping. And then, even as they watched, not once, but several times, the lettering, deep cut into the stone, reversed itself, sank down and through those unfathomable green depths until it rested on the bottom.

"White Horses," the sailor had said who had sold the curio to Lutz. And tragedy quickened to a beat of storm when Lutz himself committed suicide by drowning, first having been seen leading a white horse upon the sands. And the man could not ride. White horses—Vanaman knew their meaning, and the implication; he was familiar with Midgard, the great serpent, which is the sea; only a short time before Robinson's factory had been flooded, and in July. Irrelevant facts—perhaps.

Then, as he walked by the Delaware River with Leilah, they saw the tide coming in, salt, brackish. And as if that were not enough—as if fate were determined that they should by no chance, nor for the briefest interval forget—out of a byway that joined the road came a man—and he was leading a white horse!

CHAPTER VII.

WHITE HORSES *(continued)*.

VANAMAN'S nerves were overtaut from strain and lack of sleep. He halted, with a muttered ejaculation.

"What is it?" asked the girl.

The surprise in her tone reminded him that Miss Robinson had not his reason for starting at the bare sight of a white horse. Her attention in reading of Lutz's death had been given to the fact of his suicide, almost ignoring the apparently irrational purchase of the horse, Mirror.

"Nothing," the doctor replied to her query, and again they walked on.

The man and horse were coming toward them, and now Vanaman himself wondered that sight of the pair should have so shocked him. Save for the fact that the horse was white and the man a man, they had hardly a characteristic between them reminiscent of the Atlantic City episode.

Mirror had been a blooded animal, and so strikingly beautiful that even in the earlier newspaper account, before the reporter had learned the beast's pedigree, mention had been made of its appearance. This poor brute, on the other hand, might have been handsome a score of years ago; it was merely pitiful now. Gaunt, dirty, harness and collar-galled, its white hide yellow in great patches from lack of grooming, it limped along on swollen hocks like a very effigy of neglected, equine old age.

This story began in The Argosy for March 6.

And save that he was not old, its human escort seemed in hardly better case. The purchaser of Mirror, though mud-splashed, had been noticeably well-dressed. This fellow was clad in a dirty brown shirt and disreputably ancient trousers; his feet were bare, and his untrimmed tow-colored hair stood out from his hatless head in absurd, ragged points, among which clung bits of straw, as if the man had last slept in a stable.

From his gaunt face, tanned brown by wind and sun, pale gray eyes stared bleakly with an oddly vacant look, almost like the eyes of a blind man. That he was not blind, however, was presently proved, for meeting the two who had come out to forget, his bleak eyes shifted suddenly from vacancy to Leilah's face, from her to the doctor and back again. Then his thin-lipped mouth widened in a sneering grin.

Vanaman was in no mood to tolerate even silent insolence of that sort; his fists clenched, and in passing he half turned. The fellow was looking over his shoulder, still grinning. He jerked a dirty thumb backward, indicating the horse.

"Best I could get, matey," he leered. "Good enough, yer think?"

"What's that?" demanded the doctor.

"That's a horse," the man explained, deliberately misunderstanding the question. "A white horse. Don't blame yer for not bein' sure what it is, but what can yer expect fer five dollars? I give all I had in the world fer it." He laughed mirthlessly. "That's more than Lutz give fer his, the tight-fisted Jew! Did yer read in the paper how he beat the price down from thirty-five hundred to three thousand? A Jew like him would be bound to make that sort of break and lose out. Now I hold that havin' give my last cent fer this charmin' brute, my five-dollar plug is worth more than Lutz's three-thousand-dollar thoroughbred. What yer got to say to that, Dr. Vanaman?"

The doctor eyed him rather wildly. Just at that minute he was swept by a ghastly doubt that any of this was real; that he was not himself mad, and subject to delusions of fantom sea-tides, hawk-faced old tyrants, amazing strangers, and white horses. Then he looked at Leilah, and recaptured his mental balance. He had not been alone in hearing that astonishing speech, for bewilderment and dawning dread were in every line of the girl's delicate features.

He whirled on the stranger almost fiercely.

"Who are you?" he snapped. "How did you know my name?"

The vagabond's sneering grin widened.

"Why, d'ye see," he drawled, "I got reasons of my own fer keepin' track of what goes on in a certain house. That's how I knows yer name, matey. And I tells yer frank what you've likely guessed already: yer mixed in a bad business, matey, and before yer done you'll be buyin' a white horse of yer own, or I miss my guess. And take my advice, matey. When yer buys it, don't yer make Lutz's mistake and think yer can wriggle out easy. Pay all you've got in the world, matey, down to the shirt on yer back. And yer can tell old millionaire Robinson that broke as I am, I wouldn't stand in his shoes fer three times all his money! Tell him Blair said that, will yer? Jim Blair. He'll understand. So-long, matey. Me and beauty here's got a engagement."

He jerked at the frayed rope which, in lieu of halter, was tied about the ungainly beast's neck, and lifting its drooped caricature of a head an inch or so it shambled patiently on in the wake of its master.

Vanaman made no effort to follow or stop them. When a minute later he saw the pair turn off the drive, go plunging and stumbling down the embankment, and head for a reed-grown spit of land which extended a short distance into the river, he turned abruptly and caught Leilah's arm.

"Come away, Miss Robinson," he said between his teeth. "I have no right to interfere, and I'm not sure I wish to. But there's no need of your watching them. Something is about to happen out there which would distress you. Come away!"

"But, doctor, that must be the very man you wished to trace—the one who sold Mr. Lutz the green box! I remember Frisby said that he was tall and lean, very ragged and dirty, with pale eyes—"

"Come away!"

Almost forcibly, Vanaman drew her with him, and in half-frightened perplexity the girl yielded. Walking fast, they had soon reached the boulevard again, and were out of sight of the river. But though the girl, alarmed by his insistence, had not looked back, Vanaman had done so while they were still on the Drive—and had seen what he expected to see.

They had been out scarcely half an hour, and old Robinson looked up in angered surprise when, without any formality of knocking, the door of his study was flung open and Dr. Vanaman entered alone. Then something he saw in the doctor's face and manner caused the old man's hawk-brows to draw more fiercely together.

"What has happened?" he snarled. "Where's Leilah? Ye damned pup, if ye've let any harm come to my gal—"

"Your niece is perfectly safe, Mr. Robinson." For all the tension his eyes expressed, the doctor's voice was very cold and even. "I wish and in fact demand a little interview with you alone, sir, and for that reason Miss Robinson has very kindly excused us both for a time. There are several questions to which I demand answers, and the first two are these: Why did Jacob Lutz commit suicide when the white horse he had purchased escaped from his knife on Atlantic City beach? And why did Jim Blair—yes, I thought you'd know that name!—why, I say, did Jim Blair, having also purchased a white horse, lead it to the river when the water was salt with the incoming tide—and cut its throat? Why did he cut its throat there, so that the blood ran into the river? Come, sir, you've been using me blindfolded long enough! If I'm to go any further in this cursed business, I've got to know where I'm going. *Why were those things done?"*

CHAPTER VIII.

PSYCHOMETRY.

TO demand is very well, and not difficult for any one who is young, forceful, and keyed almost to breaking point by circumstances which in the normal course of a normal person's life have no right to be. To endorse those demands may or may not be quite so easy. In Mr. Jesse J. Robinson, for instance, the demander of anything whatever, reasonable or otherwise, was likely to find a resistance more than proportionate to the force in action against it.

Dr. Vanaman was young, strong-willed, and resolute. But at the end of that interview he knew that he had merely dashed himself against the steel of a will not only the full equal of his own in strength, but having the advantage of a ruthless cunning to which he could by no means lay claim.

He had fancied that his feeling for Leilah, a secret almost from his own soul, was unsuspected by her uncle. Now he learned differently. Keen hawk-eyes had seen much more than they appeared to, and at this first real rebellion of the slave he had taken unto himself, old Robinson tightened his grip in a very disconcerting manner.

"So ye won't stay by me without I satisfy your prying curiosity, eh? Ye'll leave me to fight my own battles this very night, without I account for the foolishness of them two durn fools, Blair and Lutz, and tell ye, besides, all I know about this here?"

His grasping claws caressed the green box, and his voice rose in snarling triumph. "All right! Clear out, then, ye wuthless, quittin' whelp! Leilah and me, we can git on without ye! Leilah's a Robinson, and the Old Nick himself, hoofs, horns, tail, and brimstone, can't make a quitter of that gal!

"Skeered, maybe; yes. But she'll stick by her old Uncle Jesse till Tophet freezes. You're sweet on that gal. Oh, yes, ye are, now; d'ye think old Jesse Robinson's a fool to believe ye've took a job that drags ye through hell every night, and kep' it even this long for any other reason?

"Well, then! Ye want Leilah should hev your job o' watching by me? I warn ye, that's what 'll happen if ye quit. I can trust Leilah, and I've learnt I can trust you; but 'fore the Lord, there ain't another body living I'd want to take chances on trusting to watch by me right now! One of ye two I will hev beside me. Which is it to be? You or Leilah?"

"I'll stay," conceded Vanaman rather hoarsely.

"Course ye will!" sneered the other, and added, with one of his steely, flashing glances: "That don't mean ye'll git Leilah, neither, mind. I aim to hev that gal marry somebody wuth while!"

The doctor set his teeth and fairly ground his temper under his heel. There was small profit to be gained by giving rein to it. He had his choice: to hand over the full burden of those dreadful nights to the girl of the moonlight hair; or himself to carry on, and bear as best might be the gross insults which went with the singular service. He realized that Robinson was speaking again.

"Now we've got all that settled, I'll tell ye something, doctor. It's for your own good I ain't making the full truth known to ye. Blair knows it. Lutz knew part of it. I know as much as Blair. We three, I'm free to admit, hev all had some cause to worry. But Blair and Lutz and me, we've been in this thing a way that you nor Leilah ain't, and as long as ye jest obey orders and keep from pryin' too deep and don't git skeered of what can't really hurt ye, you're safe as a church and ye won't be buyin' any white horses, neither.

"Not but what white horses are good enough, in a way. I named them two as fools, but I dunno but in Lutz's place or Blair's, I might try the same thing myself —mebbe. My own position's right different from theirs now, though. It ain't white horses *he* wants from me. He's like old Jesse Robinson; that's why I've got such a lot of respect for him and am kind of enjoying out little meet-up. *His* motto's the same as mine. What he wants he gets, and what he gets he keeps. All except this here box, and he's kinda lost his grip on this, eh? Well, then!"

"Mr. Robinson," broke in the doctor, rising suddenly, "I do know why those white horses were bought, and I understand better than you think what it is you believe you are fighting. But whatever the history of that box—for whatever reason it is haunted by hallucination for those who own or are near it—the belief you hold is madness! Such things cannot be.

"Lutz went literally mad over the same delusion you cherish; you know how he ended. Blair is going the same road soon, or I mistook the look in his eyes to-day. For God's sake, man, pull up before it's too late, and you and I and perhaps even that poor, lovely child your niece—follow those other two! What you believe in is illusion —folly—outrageous superstition! But the real truth, whatever it is, has produced in that box an accursed thing. Get rid of it! Break it to pieces, or cast it into the sea if you prefer—"

He checked, amazed even yet by the really frightful anger which his tyrant's face was capable of expressing. The knotted brows writhed above eyes like points of blue fire; the beak-shaped nose seemed to curve more sharp and cruel, while out of that fanged, oblong aperture, his mouth, issued a sound that was not articulate, but the wordless, savage warning of a predacious creature.

Before the torrent of objurgation he knew would follow could be uttered, Vanaman wheeled and left the study. He had failed, and must make the best of it, but he felt the need of getting a better grip on his own temper before taking any more of Robinson's uncalled-for abuse.

That night all up and down the Atlantic coast raged a storm such as even winter seldom looses, and from Nova Scotia to the Florida Keys the sea was flung, ravening, upon the helpless land. The frail defenses of man went down before it; and in many a supposedly safe harbor, and in many a flooded coast town, the green, hissing marauder claimed toll of human life.

Up the Delaware swept such a tide as she had not known in all her history, and the lower part of even Tremont, over fifty miles from the coast, was inundated by its far-flung rage. At Kensington, a few miles beyond, some of the great manufacturing plants were completely flooded. The Robinson Brothers' Engine Works suffered heavily, and next day the latter's amiable owner, after an early phone call from the general manager at the plant, found occasion to express very forcible annoyance.

It was Sunday, but unlikely to be a day of rest for any one connected with the en-

gine works. A large government contract stood in danger of being tied up, and Robinson, after a hurried breakfast, flung out of the house and into his car with the expressed determination to "git that water drained off if I have to murder a few of them wuthless loafers who want to lay around and twiddle their thumbs and wait. Wait! Damn 'em! They'd wait till the cussed Delaware dries up, and me losin' money every day—"

He was gone, and a certain atmosphere of relief enfolded the house he had vacated.

For Leilah and Dr. Vanaman, however, the relief was not so great as it might have been had they not been left to guard a blue-green, polished, beautiful enigma, the very sight of which they both loathed. Again its owner had extracted a solemn promise from his resentful but trustworthy slave not to let the box for one instant out of his sight and keeping.

"The cussed thing is *mine*," he had emphasized. "It's not Leilah's, and it ain't yours. Understand that, and—"

"If you have any mad idea that I want to claim ownership in it—" began the doctor indignantly, but Robinson had cut him short.

"Ye plaguey fool, no!" he snapped. "Shet up and listen. This box is *mine*. You and Leilah, you're jest my agents, and though you're responsible to me ye ain't responsible to—to somebody that used to hev this box and is actin' up mighty dangerous trying to git it back. Don't ye ever dass't think of it as anybody's but mine; then I reckon you're safe enough. Fergit that warning, and I won't guarantee nothing. Understand?"

"You know that I do not—not fully. But I shall remember what you've said."

After Robinson had gone the day passed quietly enough until mid-afternoon, when the door-bell rang and presently the butler brought Vanaman a card.

"Show the lady into the library, Frisby," he instructed, after a moment's contemplation. "And ask Miss Robinson if she will be so very good as to join me there at her convenience."

He descended, taking the box with him, and when a few minutes later Leilah appeared in the library she found him conversing with a tall, angular, determined-looking woman dressed in black. Her iron-gray hair was fairly strained back under an old-fashioned black bonnet, and the stern severity of her countenance would have been rather appalling, had it not been relieved by a pair of very kindly, bright brown eyes, so like the doctor's own that Leilah instantly and correctly surmised blood relationship.

"Miss Robinson, I would like you to know my aunt, Miss Fellowes. This, Aunt Jane, is the young lady who, as I wrote you, shares with me the desire to see a very curious problem solved."

"And as soon as I had Jack's letter I came straight on," announced the visitor, in tones as positive as her appearance.

"That was extremely kind of you, and I am very pleased to make the acquaintance of a relative of Dr. Vanaman."

Leilah spoke cordially, though inwardly bewildered. Was this the "person in New York" to whom he had referred as necessary to the second plan, which he would have preferred not to take? If so, what was that plan, and why had he hesitated over it? But as the conversation proceeded, her naturally quick intuition divined the reason well enough, and in connection with any other matter than the green box she might have found it just a little bit amusing.

Dr. Vanaman's aunt was a spiritualist, and not only that, but a spiritualist of the most pronounced and aggressive school.

That "Jack," who according to his aunt had been a grossly blind materialist from his youth up, should have had to admit that there really was something in the world a bit past his understanding, seemed to give her something very like gloating triumph. Moreover, she had apparently assumed that from this on he was full convert to her own rather extreme views. "Spirits," "communicators," "guides," "percipients," and "psychic forces" haunted that library in verbal form till in desperation the doctor held up a protesting hand.

"Aunt Jane," he pleaded, "I can't possibly swallow all that at once. Please don't

be annoyed with me, but I really can't! Maybe everything you say is true. Maybe every inch of the space we move through is crowded with spirits, and maybe it's as easy to establish communication with Julius Cæsar as it is to call up the telephone operator. But all that was not exactly what I wanted your help about. I'll admit that I have a strong natural aversion for belief in the supernatural. I believe that if apparently supernormal phenomena exist their cause can—must be traced to some natural law, not previously recognized, perhaps, but as fixed and actually natural as the law of gravitation.

"Now I know, Aunt Jane, that you've had some rather curious experiences of your own. You told me about them last year, and if I seemed to take them lightly may God forgive me, for what I have been through the last few nights— But never mind that now. You told me that you had seen some sort of visions, and heard voices—"

"I talked with your grandfather's ghost," interpolated his aunt with abrupt firmness.

"Very well. You talked with grandfather's ghost. According to that, Aunt Jane, you must be what you spiritualists term 'sensitive.' Now, with all due respect and apologies, I haven't sufficient faith in the veracity of a professional medium to trust one of them with a certain experiment I want made. In the case of this box"—he eyed the green thing that lay across his knees, and shuddered slightly—"in the case of this box any one who is even slightly 'sensitive' in the sense we mean should be able to prove or disprove my theory."

"What is it about the box that has troubled you so much, Jack?"

His aunt's voice was suddenly as as kindly and sympathetic as it had formerly been didactic.

"I would rather not tell you just yet. Miss Robinson and I wish to find out something about its history. I've heard that a medium can sometimes—er—tell the history of an object merely by touching it—"

"But I don't at all pretend to be a medium, Jack."

"Miss Fellowes," interposed Leilah, "won't you please at least try to help us out? If you knew—if you could by any possibility guess the frightful—frightful—horrors—"

Her voice trembled and she broke off, biting at her lips. Miss Fellowes looked surprised; the sympathy in her brown eyes deepened.

"Why, you poor children! I had no idea there was anything very dreadful attached to the affair. Certainly, I'll do all I can to help. But you mustn't give way to fear, child. There is nothing in the spirit world to harm you. Sometimes people are harmed, but they are injured by their own fright, not by any evil influence. I myself have learned to fear nothing. I think I can truthfully say, Miss Robinson, that there is nothing in this world or the other of which I am afraid!"

She looked it, too, sitting bolt upright, shoulders back, sternly severe save for the betraying kindliness in her bright brown eyes. Somehow for all her talk of spirits there was a matter-of-fact practicality about Miss Jane Fellowes which made her very presence reassuring.

"Exactly what did you wish me to do, Jack? Of course, you mustn't expect me to go into a trance. As I said before, I don't even pretend to be a real psychic."

"Well, you might take the box in your hands to begin with. And then if you—er—see anything, you can describe it to us."

Despite recent experiences, Vanaman was feeling rather foolish over the affair. He wished the idea of asking his aunt to come on had never occurred to him. Very methodically she was removing her black silk gloves, rolling them up and placing them in her hand-bag. Her hands, Leilah observed, were beautiful; not the kind of hands one expected from those stern, almost harsh features. Long, slender, delicate, there was temperament in every line of them.

"I'll take it now, Jack."

Fascinated, Leilah watched as the doctor half reluctantly placed his detested charge in the hands extended to receive it. What would come of this? Was there any chance that they were about to learn the dread secret which made that clouded, emerald-

like thing a menace to sanity, at least, if dangerous in no worse way?

"It is extremely pretty," commented Miss Fellowes's positive tones. She was turning it about, admiring the shifting shades of green. "Oh! You were holding it upside down, weren't you? What is this red writing on the cover?"

"I don't know. Give the thing back to me, Aunt Jane. I was foolish to expect results from such an experiment and—I don't like to see you holding it!"

"Why, Jack, you are really afraid of this box, aren't you? My dear boy, there is nothing in psychic experiences to harm one. If this beautiful little casket is haunted by the restless spirit of some past owner, we, I am entirely sure, have nothing to fear. Such apparitions, Jack, are caused by the effort of earth-bound souls to make themselves seen and known again in the material world. Spirits of that order are to be pitied, not feared."

"Aunt Jane, I tell you this is not a matter of ghost-walking. The apparition that haunts that box—is not—human—"

"No? Really, you arouse my curiosity immensely. Perhaps one of the elementals has been playing tricks on you. Raja Ramput, one of our greatest teachers, told me with his own lips that he had seen a fire elemental—the spiritual essence of fire, you understand—play all about the room where a séance was going on, and apparently set the curtains in a blaze. But no real harm was done. The elementals are mischievous and like to frighten people when they can. I know better than to be afraid, however. Now I shall close my eyes, endeavor to make my mind quite blank, and if any definite ideas or visions come to me I'll let you know."

Sitting up very straight and rigid, holding the box in her lap with long, delicate fingers resting lightly just over the scarlet inscription, she did close her eyes. Several minutes of dead silence ensued. Miss Fellowes was quiet as a graven image, and looked rather like one, too.

It occurred to Vanaman that any fearful qualities the box possessed might well be held in stern repression so long as it remained in the keeping of his Aunt Jane.

Then Leilah gave a low cry, and the doctor half started from his chair. There was reason for dismay.

Over those stern, determined features had swept a sudden and dreadful change. Every drop of blood seemed to leave the face in a moment, the very lips went blue-white, and the eyes flashed open with a look of such awful fear in their depths as Vanaman had never seen in the eyes of a living creature.

"Oh—how—horrible!" The voice was a rasping cry, harsh and unfamiliar. "How—horrible! The cities—the scarlet cities—crashing—falling— Save me! Oh, God, won't anybody save me? There he is! There! It is he, I tell you! The archangel—Oh, God—it is the archangel! *The archangel of the abyss—*"

Leaping forward, the doctor snatched the green casket from his aunt's hands and fairly flung it upon the table. Then he caught her in his arms just in time to prevent her toppling sidewise to the floor.

Jane Fellowes, who had been so sternly sure of her courage to face any abnormal phenomena, and "feared nothing in this world or the other," had fainted dead away from sheer terror.

CHAPTER IX.

A DARING CHALLENGE.

AND again Leilah and Dr. Vanaman were alone with a problem not only unsolved, but which seemed even a shade more sinister for its startling effect upon a person of Miss Fellowes's previously fearless and determined character.

Under hastily applied restoratives she had soon recovered consciousness and seemed physically little the worse for her experience. But whatever strange vision had flashed before her closed eyes, she was either unable to recall it clearly, or literally dared not describe it. Recalling his own and Leilah's hesitation to express in words the cause for their own worst fears, Vanaman rather fancied that the latter reason for her reticence might be the true one.

He had no heart to question his aunt very searchingly. She was tremulous and

shaken as by some severe shock, and he felt sick with self-reproach that he had deliberately dragged another innocent victim within the green casket's evil influence.

Leilah, though with secret misgivings on her uncle's account, had urged Miss Fellowes to remain with them till the following day; but Dr. Vanaman's aunt had had enough and more than enough of that house. A few short minutes, it seemed, had robbed her of all pretense to courage, and the mere vicinity of the green box appeared to cause her the most acute distress.

Vaguely she assured her nephew that she had been through an experience which cured her forever of any liking for or interest in the occult, entreated him to leave the house with her and promise never to return; and when he refused, insisted on at once taking her own departure.

Since Vanaman's solemn promise forbade him to desert his charge, Leilah ordered out the runabout and herself saw the poor woman to the railroad station and off on the first New York train.

Returning, she found the doctor still in the library, very meditative and depressed, though he greeted Leilah with attempted lightness.

"Archangels and scarlet cities are a new development," he smiled.

"Not altogether so," she corrected him.

"No? Have you seen—"

"Nothing that you have not. But I think you have forgotten or perhaps overlooked something. Wait."

She rang for Frisby, and when the man appeared asked him to bring them the noon edition of yesterday's *Inquirer*. From somewhere at the back of the house he resurrected it, and alone once more the girl pointed to a sentence in the earlier account of Lutz's death.

"The man, who was well dressed but hatless, splashed with mud, and, according to Dolan, rather wild-eyed, made a muttered reply in which the guards could distinguish only some reference to an 'archangel,' and passed on."

"You see?" commented Leilah quietly.

"I see nothing," Vanaman protested, rumpling his reddish-brown hair till it stood up wildly. "Archangels—scarlet cities—they only confuse what few coherent ideas I had of the affair. Lutz 'muttered something about an archangel.' But why should he sacrifice a white horse to an archangel?"

Leilah's eyes opened wide.

"Sacrifice? You mean those two men bought white horses to *sacrifice* them?"

Vanaman nodded miserably.

"They most surely did. In all the ancient worship of the sea, whether under the older Greek name of Poseidon, or as the Roman Neptune, black bulls and white horses were considered the most acceptable offering. I had a very definite suspicion of Lutz's purpose when I first read that account. He didn't use his knife to strike at the life-guard, as it says. He struck at the horse, but not Dolan. He meant to cut Mirror's throat there on the beach, and failing in that seems to have gone clean raving mad and drowned himself.

"When we met Blair at the river he was bound on a similar errand. I didn't interfere, because I was afraid of precipitating a similar result. He succeeded in making his offering, and may God let it bring him peace! Though it's a rankly pagan custom, I am beginning to understand how they may have been driven to it. But Poseidon, god of the sea, was not an archangel. Where does the archangel come in?"

Leilah did not reply, and he saw that she was staring with strange, fascinated eyes fixed on lucent depths of green. He snatched the box from the table, tucked it under one arm, and rose.

"You, at least, need not be sacrificed, Miss Robinson! If I swear to you that under no circumstances and for no reason, imaginable or otherwise, will I desert your uncle so long as he keeps this box—won't you in turn consent to leave here for a while? You have other relatives with whom you could stay. Go to them! I beg and entreat of you, go!"

The girl shook her head, smiling. This was not the first time Vanaman had voiced that plea, but his "sprite of the moonlight," as he had fancifully thought of her, pos-

sessed a resolution firm as her uncle's, though of different quality.

"I couldn't possibly leave him," she countered. "He relies on me in many ways, and needs me now, I think, more than ever. I can't go, but you can. There is no claim of duty to hold you here, Dr. Vanaman."

He turned away, head slightly bowed. Sometimes the best and most innocent of women will administer a stabbing hurt and remain quite unconscious of it.

"I prefer to stay," he said in a low voice, and carrying the box to the suite of rooms he shared with his employer, spent the rest of the afternoon alone with it.

Robinson returned late, tired out, and in an uncommonly savage humor. His mood found its appropriate victim in the man he held by a tenuous but unbreakable bond; ruthless judge and manager of men that he had always been, the old hawk was sure of Vanaman as of Leilah, and since in his own peculiar way he really loved the latter and cared nothing about the former, the girl was peremptorily dismissed from her uncle's presence and Vanaman received full benefit of the evil temper generated by conditions at the engine works.

It was an unpleasant martyrdom, and before the evening was over the doctor hated Robinson as he had never known he could hate any human being.

Though the day had been fair, night promised another storm. Toward morning the promise was fulfilled with a violence that seemed to shake the very earth; and lying awake, expectant, Vanaman found it hard to quell and banish certain foolish notions.

Yet this night was better in one respect than any he had spent here. Brief snatches of sleep visited him, and from each he would start quiveringly alert; but not even once did the menacing hiss of a fantom but terrible approach mingle with the sounds of rain, raving against the windows.

Indeed, had Vanaman been willing to accept the belief he suspected Robinson of holding, he might have thought that the unhuman Thing which claimed the green box was using its utmost force in other ways, and had none to spare for empty hallucinations. As it was, grim pictures flashed before his fancy.

While the house shook in the grip of unseasonable storm, he saw with the mind's eye an unconquered, ravening blackness, that gleamed translucent green when the lightning's lance shook above it. Over the globe's broad curve it roared hungrily, and the crests of its monstrous billows were tossed toward the clouds, like the myriad, wind-torn manes of white horses racing.

They flung themselves on the land, and the land vanished beneath their thunderous hoofs. A wailing rose in the night; earth shook and shuddered; mountains crashed into mighty flares of flame, and by the leaping light of those awful torches he saw the shrieking race of men devoured, swept away, made nothing. He saw earth open yawning mouths that swallowed whole cities, gulped and closed again. And where the cities had been—the ten glittering, scarlet cities—there surged and thundered the white-maned hosts of *him*—

Vanaman shook himself awake again and scowled vengefully across the room at a green box clutched tight in two clawlike hands. Better to lie awake than dream dreams like that.

Day returned at last, and again the lash of the tempest rested, and from north to south, down the long sweep of the Atlantic coast, men cursed, wept, counted their lost, and wondered.

Old Jesse J. Robinson had slept like a child, but the slightly better humor in which he awoke was quickly shattered by the morning's news. Grim-faced, steely eyes narrowed, he read of the ravages wrought by the sea while he slumbered.

Watching him across the breakfast table, Vanaman thought that so might appear the grim old tyrant of a city, reading the despatches that told of some strong enemy's gains. Of a beleaguered, beautiful, scarlet city that would not yield—

The doctor gave himself a mental shake. For God's sake, what was coming over him? Continually, like a moving succession of small, bright pictures, the strangest ideas and fancies marched across the dull

background of an overweary brain. He dared not even inspect them too closely. He remembered Lutz and Blair. Was *that* fate on its way to him? Then he glanced at Leilah, and steadied himself with an effort. His part was to guard at any cost, and he must keep steady.

Robinson left shortly for his beloved and endangered engine works; or so Vanaman and his niece supposed.

The old hawk's errand this time, however, proved to have been quite other than that of yesterday. The doctor had believed himself hardened to amazement and more or less proof against shocks; but the announcement made by Robinson on his return, some hours later, strained his self-command to the uttermost.

On coming in, the old man greeted Leilah with a somewhat preoccupied air, then beckoned Vanaman.

"Want to talk with ye alone, doctor," he said briefly, and led the way to his study.

He seated himself, motioning the doctor to do likewise.

"Now," he began, "I want to ask ye a very important question. I want ye to think twice, and look yourself mighty close in the eyes before ye answer it. Are you game? Are ye clean, honest-to-goodness, can't-be-made-a-quitter-by-nothin', a sure, dead game?"

Vanaman looked rather bored, and his eyes narrowed slightly.

"I really couldn't say," he drawled. "You will have to judge that for yourself, Mr. Robinson."

A reluctant grin twitched for an instant at the old man's mouth.

"Jedgin' by the short experience I've had with ye, I should say ye are. But if ye've got the least suspicion that, plug down deep enough, a body might find even the faintest shade of yaller, then take old Jesse Robinson's advice and clear out now, while ye've got the chance. For I'll tell ye something, son: Ye think ye've been pretty hardly used and badly tried; and so ye hev. But if ye stick now, I warn ye a trial's on its way to ye beside which what's passed was child's play. Jest mere light, amusin' child's play! Understand?"

The doctor scowled.

"If you would have the commonplace decency, Mr. Robinson, to be frank with a man who, you admit, has done his utmost blindfolded, that man might possibly not only understand, but be of far greater value to you."

"So? But that's another thing for me to jedge, and I jedge different. You suspicion what we're up against, but in the fool pride of your schooling and book-knowledge ye refuse to believe in it. That's all right. You ain't old Jesse Robinson, and if ye did know the truth and believed it, I reckon ye'd hunt the nearest hole to hide in and be no more good to me. But this much I'll tell ye, and ye can make what ye like of it:

"What I want I get, and what I get I keep. That's been my motto always, and I intend to hold by it. But on t'other hand, I ain't anyways as mean as some folks hold me. I ain't aiming to see whole cityfuls of people outed in this business. The fight's between me and *him*, and I'm willing to let it be so. What *he* gets he keeps; and what *I* get I keep.

"If he can take this here box from me fair, all right. But I don't jest reckon he can, and that's why he's raising murder over it trying to skeer me into giving up. To test that—fair—without involving any more of the general damage to property and life he's saw fit to work, I've done a thing that may or may not skeer ye, jest accordin' to how much of the truth ye believe and how near ye come to being dead up-and-down game—like me and Leilah."

The old man's face had lighted with a grim, unholy daring, and his steely eyes glittered as they roved about the room. They came at last to fixed rest on the casket.

"We're going to sea, my son," he announced abruptly. "Me and this here green beauty and you, if ye've got the nerve—we're going to meet the party that wants my property, fair and open. There ain't nobody nor nothing can bluff nor bully old Jesse Robinson. I aim to prove that. They's a first-rate bit of sea-goin' shipping down at the docks. Her name's the

Nagaina, and she was built for rough work up north. I'm told the storm ain't yet blowed that can down the Nagaina, so I reckon she's my boat. Leastways, I'm chartering her for a two months' cruise, and I aim to go aboard of her this very day. Now, young man, *are you game?* Because if ye ain't, Leilah is, and I'll take the gal instead!"

CHAPTER X.

OUTWARD BOUND.

OF actual facts transpiring through the remainder of that day, Dr. Vanaman had afterward only a confused and indefinite memory. Perhaps lack of sleep had told on him more heavily than it would have done under more normal conditions. Or perhaps his fear of the morning had not been wholly unfounded, and that which drove two such commonplace individuals as Blair and Lutz to offer up pagan sacrifice was beginning to set its deadly seal on him also.

Certain it is that all through the long afternoon, busy enough for others, but dreamily idle for the green casket's faithful guardsman, he was scarcely aware nor thinking of what went on about him, and dared he but close his eyes for an instant strange, fleeting visions flashed up behind the lids.

He had made his choice, where for him there was no choice. Let the truth be what it might, the mad voyage Robinson proposed would bring about the very thing Vanaman had urged in vain. Leilah would not desert her uncle, but the latter was leaving her, and on those terms Vanaman was ready if not exactly eager to accompany the green box and its owner to the devil, if need be.

Though he followed so little of what went on, that was a lively and exciting afternoon for many people. When Robinson chose to have things done in a hurry, as a rule they were done, for the old hawk's executive ability and knack of extracting from people, efforts which surprised themselves, but not him, were marked as his stubbornness and indifference to the will or pleasure of any one but Jesse J. Robinson.

The Nagaina, fortunately for his sudden resolve, was already coaled, fully manned, and partly provisioned. She was a small but sturdy steamer, designed to fight through the perilous, ice-infested seas of the extreme north. Formerly used for the transportation of freight and passengers in the waters of northern Canada, she had been chartered from that service by an ambitious and wealthy young man, who desired to emulate and possibly excel the achievements of Lieutenant Peary, but lacking government backing had outfitted for an expedition on his own account.

The young man's sudden demise in a railroad accident had left the Nagaina's charter a useless asset of his estate, and the trustees had been delighted to receive Robinson's unexpected offer. The terms on which he relieved them of their white elephant included a haste in transfer that rather took their breath away; but the old millionaire had done an eccentric thing or so before in his life, and knew how to put this one through.

His own lawyers, well trained to execute any sort of sudden and complicated commands, met the trustees and wrestled with them. The will had not gone to probate, but a more or less legal loophole was discovered by which the trustees might act in this emergency. They found themselves shoved through it, a line of reasoning to use with the probate judge bestowed gratuitously upon them, the charter transferred, and Robinson's certified check in their hands, almost before it occurred to them that they might demand an extra bonus for such unseemly speed.

Almost, not quite. Robinson paid heavily for this particular eccentricity, but as they knew he could well afford it his lawyers were not worried over that. Triumphant, they flung themselves into a taxi, motored straight to their employer's residence, and there spent a somewhat longer time in receiving his very precise instructions as to the handling of affairs in his absence, and particularly in case of his nonreturn. They may have wondered deeply as the rest of the world over the freak that

was sending Robinson on so sudden a "pleasure voyage"—he termed it that—and on such a vessel as the Nagaina. But if so, they kept their wonder to themselves. Had they not been wise enough to refrain from superfluous questioning, they would not have been attorneys to Jesse J. Robinson.

Down at the docks, meantime, a burly sea-captain swore, and still burlier stevedores sweated. The order to complete the Nagaina's provisioning and make her ready for immediate clearance had been received by Captain Porter with annoyance and dismay.

"A yacht!" he growled disgustedly to his second. "They've made a bloomin' yacht out of the old Nagaina! We're to take a bloomin' millionaire on a pleasure voyage! It 'll be, 'Captain, put in at Bar Harbor,' and 'Captain, I've changed my mind; we'll make the Bahamas instead,' and 'Captain, spread an awning on the quarter-deck; I want to take my bloomin' siesta there!'

"I know 'em! I was second once on a Bermuda passenger boat, and there's no pleasing 'em. I'm going ashore to buy some pink and blue ribbon, Mr. Crosby, and when I come back you can tie it around her funnels before our new charterer thinks to order it done. Maybe that 'll please him. Hell!"

To all of which Crosby listened with a wide grin, and not sharing the bitter sentiments of his superior. A pleasure voyage, even with the most exacting of millionaires aboard, appealed to him as preferable to the rough hardships of the frozen north.

At six o'clock Captain Porter's anticipated trials began. A boat put off from the city wharf bringing a man who introduced himself as Robinson's valet demanded to be shown the cabin his master would occupy, and proceeded to rearrange and embellish it in a manner which completed Porter's disgust, and filled the steward, who helped, with amazed awe. The fellow had brought off a boat-load of "silly, womanish junk," as Porter characterized the soft mattresses, silken quilts, fine linen, and other luxuries with which the bare, dingy little stateroom presently incongruously blossomed. A complete Sèvres dining service and silver appropriate thereto was the final straw. Porter clumped sadly up the companion ladder.

"Why didn't he charter a bloomin' steam yacht?" he mourned to his still grinning second. "Why did he pick on me? Why didn't he charter a bloomin' steam yacht, all pretty mahogany and brasses? That's what I want to know!"

Nearly eight o'clock, and Robinson entered the room where Dr. Vanaman brooded alone over his charge.

"We're leaving," he said briefly. "Are you ready?"

As the doctor made no reply, he approached, clutched his shoulder and shook him. "What's ailing ye? Asleep?"

Vanaman stumbled to his feet.

"I'm—tired," he said heavily. "But I am ready to go."

The millionaire cast him a sharp, almost troubled glance, but made no comment, and the two passed out to the car, waiting ready in the porte-cochère. As they went Vanaman was vaguely conscious of something wrong or missing in this departure. It was not the green box. He was carrying that in a leather handbag. His hat? No; that was on his head. And his personal luggage had been packed earlier and taken down with Robinson's things. What, then? He could not think, and for sheer weariness ceased trying.

The chauffeur was holding open the door of the closed car, and as Robinson pushed his companion ahead he stumbled clumsily in and almost fell into the rear seat.

"What is it, Dr. Vanaman? Are you ill?"

That low, drawling sweet voice— Now he knew what had been wrong; whom he had missed. Leilah had not said good-by to them, and no wonder! The old hawk had tricked him. He had never meant to leave the girl behind. For an instant, under stimulus of indignation, the stupor lifted, and he was all angry protest.

"You here, Miss Robinson! But you are not going with us! You're not! I—I forbid it—"

"That 'll do, son," snarled Robinson. He stepped in and took his seat; the chauf-

feur, who already had his directions, closed the door, and in another moment they were rolling down the Drive.

"Leilah wanted to come," continued the old man composedly, "and I don't jest reckon it's for you to forbid or command my gal from doin' anything she and me choose for her to do. Understand?"

"I—guess so."

Numb weariness was on him again, and it was pleasant to lean back in soft cushions and feel the warm, delicately fragrant nearness of—of some girl he had once known, pitied, and adored. But that, of course, had all been a very long time ago.

"Fog!" snarled a voice. "Cuss it, we'll have to lay in the river till she clears. Might as well have stayed to home!"

Again roused for a moment, Vanaman saw that the car windows were blanketed with thick white mist, through which the lights of shops and street lamps glowed in hazy, shifting change. They were in the lower part of the city now, and nearing the docks.

Presently the car had rolled through an open gateway and part way down the long reach of a public wharf. It came to a stand, and the chauffeur appeared at the door.

"Will you get out here, sir?"

"How in time do I know?" snapped his employer. "Ain't ye got any sense at all, Murphy? They's four or five stairways to this wharf. Walk along and find which one the Nagaina's launch is waiting at. I give orders," he added as the man moved off on his mission, "that the launch was to meet us here round nine o'clock. It's 8.45 now, and she ought to be on hand—somewheres. Cuss the fog! Can't hardly see ten foot through it down here."

Murphy returned and climbed back to the driver's seat.

"A little further along, Mr. Robinson," he informed over his shoulder, and threw in the clutch.

A few seconds later and they had halted again. The tall, dim figure of a man loomed grayly beside the door. He opened it without waiting for the chauffeur.

"This is Mr. Robinson? We are ready for you, sir."

The voice was low, deep, and well modulated, though the fog lent it a muffled and far-away sound.

"Help me out, can't ye?" came Robinson's eternal snarl. "That's better. Durn ye, ain't ye got any sense to grab my arm that way? Ye durn near broke it!"

"I beg your pardon, sir."

The dim figure relaxed its overpowerful grip and stood back a pace or so. Leilah, who was nearest the door on this side, stepped lightly out and turned.

"Dr. Vanaman? Uncle Jesse, I believe the doctor is ill! He hasn't moved nor spoken since we left the house."

"Nonsense! Jest asleep again, I reckon. Hey, doctor, wake up!"

He leaned in and shook at Vanaman's knee.

"I'm coming."

He had heard every word spoken, but because of the heavy drowsiness that was on him had preferred to sit quiet. Something was wanted of him now, it appeared. He managed to stumble out on the wharf and stand there stupidly quiescent.

"Where's that bag? Why, ye left it on the seat! Humph! Well, so long as you're too durn sleepy to know what you're about, I reckon I'll keep charge of it myself. That's all, Murphy. Take the car home—and mind! Don't ye dasst use up my good tires and gasoline joy-riding round while I'm gone."

"No, sir."

Murphy had touched his cap and was slowly backing along the comparatively narrow wharf. The head-lamps cast funnel-shaped cones of light through the slowly drifting strata of river mist, and one of these cones rested for a long moment on the dim figure that had met the car. The head was bare, the face heavily bearded, and the man seemed to be wrapped in a long, gray cloak. Then his deep, muffled tones were speaking again:

"Will you come aboard now, sir? Everything has been prepared, and we are ready to sail with the outgoing tide."

"Sail?" repeated Robinson. "The Nagaina's a steamer, ain't she?"

"Oh, yes. The Nagaina is a steamer. But I have been long—very long—asso-

ciated with sailing-vessels, and the word comes easily to my lips. Pray, pardon it."

"Humph! Officer, be ye?"

"I have the honor to be captain, sir."

"Captain Porter, eh? Why didn't ye say so, straight off? Think ye can make it down-river in this dirty fog?"

"The fog will not interfere with our sailing, sir. If you will kindly accompany me down these steps, I will help you into the small boat that is waiting."

"Well, then! Ye don't need to be so durn ceremonious over it," grumbled Robinson. "Doctor—consarn the fool! I believe he's asleep again! Hey, doctor, *wake up!*"

Vanaman straightened with a start, and this time actually roused enough to offer Leilah his assistance in descending the dozen wooden steps that led to a small floating platform at water-level. The small boat referred to was drawn up alongside. It was not the gasoline launch Robinson had expected, however, but an oar-propelled craft. Three oarsmen could be faintly discerned occupying its thwarts, and a fourth waited on the platform, holding a lantern.

Without at all thinking about it, Vanaman observed that the lantern was not the common ship's type, but of cubical shape with ornamental wrought-iron framework forming a lattice tracery over side-panels that might have been made of old-fashioned horn, not glass, so dim and yellow was the light transmitted from within.

"If you will take your seat on that forward thwart, sir—"

"Ladies first," snapped Robinson fussily. "Git in, Leilah."

The tall captain made a sudden gesture, almost as though to prevent the girl from obeying. But Leilah was quick and deft in her motions, and already she had stepped in and taken the place indicated. The old hawk handed her the leather bag that contained his prey, and a moment later was seated beside his niece. When Vanaman would have followed, however, the captain caught his arm in that overpowerful grip of which Robinson had complained.

"I am sorry," he said firmly. "The boat will not carry so many, Mr. Robinson. When we have put yourself and the young lady aboard, there will be time enough to return for this gentleman. I understand you are in great haste to reach the sea. But so small a delay will matter little, and moreover, once started we shall sail very swiftly, for the tide will carry us along—the outflowing tide."

"The outflowing tide," gravely echoed the man with the lantern.

And as if in sentiment confirmation of the words, the dark waters that raced gurgling and seething past the piers jerked strongly at the prow of the boat, so that it swung suddenly outward. The man with the lantern stepped aboard in haste and dropped to the fourth oarsman's seat. The tall captain gave Vanaman a push that sent him stumbling back against the steps, and himself made a flying leap across the half-dozen feet of racing water that already intervened between boat and platform.

He landed neatly, standing in the stern sheets. Vanaman, staggering up, had a momentary glimpse of him as a tall, gray figure, outlined vaguely against the dim lantern-glow and very wraithlike because of the fog that swirled between. The muffled but unmistakable cry of a frightened woman drifted back to him.

And then he was alone in the dark on a little platform, beneath which unseen water seethed and raced. The tide—the outflowing tide—

Like a riven veil, or as if with the passing of the green casket some evil charm had been lifted from his brain, the stupid daze which had for hours possessed Vanaman cleared and was gone.

"Leilah! Oh—Leilah!"

Springing to the platform edge, he shouted the girl's name again and again. There returned to him no responding cry, but close at hand, just behind him, in fact, he heard a noise as of smothered laughter. Wheeling, he collided heavily with the person who had found cause for mirth in his fear-stricken shouts. His hands closed on lean shoulders.

"Sheer off there, matey! I ain't huntin' trouble."

"Blair!" gasped Vanaman. Though he had heard the man's voice only once before, that once had been under conditions to

impress its tones on his memory. He dropped one hand, but slid the other down to the fellow's upper arm where he held him firmly.

"You, Blair!" he choked. "In some cursed way or other you are behind all that's happened! What are you doing here? Why did the Nagaina's boat take those two and leave me? Answer, or—or, by heaven. I'll strangle an answer out of you!"

In the dark his free hand found the other's throat and closed on it convincingly. The man struggled, but with so feeble a resistance that even in his overwrought state Vanaman was suddenly ashamed, and his grasp relaxed.

At the same instant, the *put-put* of a rapidly nearing motor throbbed through the fog. Mingled with it came the sound of an aggrieved and mournful voice.

"Shut her off, Mr. Crosby. The bloomin' wharf's dead ahead. And now I suppose we can wait an hour or so till our millionaire charterer shows up. I know 'em! Always an hour or so behind time. But maybe it will please him that I came after him myself and then had to wait an hour. Hell!"

An intolerable suspicion stirred in Vanaman. As the shape of a small launch materialized through the fog, red and green lamps a-glitter, he greeted it in hoarse question.

"From the Nagaina?"

"My boat," resignedly acquiesced the voice. "Are you Mr. Robinson? Or is there a Mr. Robinson waiting up on the wharf? Because if there is, tell him his dunnage is all aboard, and Captain Porter has come ashore in person to do the proper honors and fandangoes expected of a yacht captain. And that ought to please him," he added *sotto voce* to his second, who was already scrambling out on the platform, lantern in hand.

But on Vanaman, the icy fingers of dismay had closed more tightly.

"For God's sake, get back there!"

He fairly thrust the Nagaina's astonished second officer back into the launch and himself followed, dragging Blair along.

"Mr. Robinson and his niece have been stolen—kidnaped!" he announced between his teeth. "Another boat was here—another man who called himself Captain Porter. I was purposely left behind, and those two taken. Get out on the river—quickly! Somewhere out there is either a small boat or a ship that means to go down-river with the tide!"

CHAPTER XI.

JAMES BLAIR, A.B.

CAPTAIN "TOM" PORTER, well known and liked among the blunt, outspoken fraternity of his own kind, had found cause for melancholy in the sudden change of charterers which made the sturdy old Nagaina a pleasure craft and demanded of himself the graces and, as he chose to take it, servility of a yacht-captain. Discovering, however, that scoundrels unknown had illicitly borrowed his identity and that of his ship and thereby wrested his despised charterer from him, Captain Porter's viewpoint toward the latter abruptly changed. Had there been stolen from him some prized and long-treasured possession, the captain could have been no more personally outraged and indignant.

Jesse J. Robinson was his—his charterer! And the captain's ideas of property rights seemed well on a par with Robinson's own.

Mr. Crosby suggested that before attempting to quarter the river on their own account, the harbor police be notified. The captain swore and ordered him to put back for the Nagaina instanter.

"We can wireless the police, and wireless every ship and station down the river. Nobody but a criminal or a fool will be moving in this weather. It's safe to demand that any craft that is moving be held up. We don't know exactly what her bloomin' type is, but she wears sails and she's a medium big one, by the cut of her bow and fore-rigging."

"What's that?" cut in Vanaman. "What do you know of her rigging? I saw nothing but the small boat."

"And we saw that and more, too," was Porter's unexpected retort. "Matter-of-fact, we passed your bloomin' kidnapers just at the identical moment when they were

hoisting their tender aboard. Mr. Crosby there, not knowing any vessel was berthed near the Nagaina, all but fouled their bow in the fog. How they got to lay to so near without our knowing it is past me. There wasn't a bloomin' sign of a vessel anchored anywhere around the Nagaina when the fog shut down.

" First we knew of her, there was her dolphin figurehead right on top of us. I yelled, and Mr. Crosby sheered off and just missed fouling her cable at that. It was hove up short, all ready for a quick getaway, as I know now. As we turned I saw the lines of her rigging sharp and black for just a minute against her riding lights. And I saw and heard them hoisting their tender in over the port bulwark. Then the fog shut in thick, and I didn't see any more, but if that wasn't your kidnapers, call me a Dutchman and be done.

" Of course, they have auxiliary power or they couldn't go down-river without a tug, fog or no fog. But she's a sailing-craft of some sort, painted black, with a red dolphin for her figurehead and a funny kind of swell-out and curve back cut to her stem that I never saw on any other boat. She'll be easy enough to identify, once caught."

" How do you know this vessel you describe isn't still anchored where you saw her?"

" I bloomin' well know it! If she's there she's at the bottom, and we just now cruised by over her. Mr. Crosby, I make the Nagaina a half-point up from this course."

" Half-point it is, sir," muttered his second, and the wheel-spokes shifted a trifle under his hands.

Vanaman realized that by instinct or knowledge almost uncanny to a landsman the captain was sure of his position on the fog-blanketed river as if the time had been high noon, with a clear sun shining.

" By the way," continued Porter, " who's the party you're clingin' to with so much affection? One of the kidnapers' gang?"

Vanaman glanced at the dilapidated figure which drooped dispirited and silent beside him.

" I think possibly he is, though I'm not certain. Tell you all I know about it later, captain. This the Nagaina?"

A black, wall-like expanse had loomed above them, and a minute later Vanaman was ascending the ladder with an agility lent him by the keenest anxiety. Blair followed without protest, and Captain Porter was no sooner on deck than he sent one of his men to route out the wireless-operator and another for his chief engineer.

Before the fog drifted in on her, the Nagaina had been expected to clear that night. The pilot was aboard, and the fires were still banked under her boilers. The engineer promised steam within the half-hour, and the pilot, though not without considerable protest, finally consented to do his best toward conning the Nagaina downstream.

" Though if she rams her nose in a mud-bank don't blame me," he added gloomily. " I'm no X-ray artist to keep the channel in this weather."

" The bloomin' weather wasn't too thick for that other craft."

" No, and she's very likely hung up on a bar this minute, waiting for your fool boat to ram in beside her."

" I don't ask anything better," retorted Porter, and there was a certain grim and anticipatory pleasure in his tone. The Nagaina's master was rather like the stout old steamer he commanded: a fighter born.

Till urgent messages had been radiographed to the Tremont harbor police and other stations both up and down river, neither the captain nor Vanaman cared to take time for explanation on the latter's part. The bare facts of the abduction with what description they could give of the suspected vessel, were sufficient to set the forces of law in motion. They also brought a police boat nosing through the fog in search of the Nagaina's berth, though by the time it arrived there the berth was empty and the Nagaina cautiously feeling her way down-channel.

By wireless, however, she remained in touch with the shore stations, and there was a bare chance that she might overhaul the black, dolphin-headed stranger even before the latter could be intercepted by the authorities. The hoarse hooting of her siren rang out belligerently. She snorted and puffed like a large, angry sea-beast, her

propellers half the time in reverse as she fought against being carried along with too dangerous a speed by the racing current. She was clumsy and noisy, the Nagaina, but very honest and resolute.

The pilot had taken the bridge, and not being needed there Porter found time at last to question Vanaman more fully. With that mysteriously recrudescent individual, Jim Blair, still in tow, the doctor accompanied Porter into the privacy of the chart-house and there laid before him exactly as much as he deemed fit of events leading up to the abduction.

On the stranger side of the affair he touched not at all, merely stating that Mr. Robinson had in his possession a certain casket, of contents unknown to him, Vanaman; that Mr. Robinson had many times referred to some person or persons, also unknown, who wished to deprive him of the said possession; that Mr. Robinson had the casket with him when abducted; and that the simplest assumption seemed to be that the abductors and the supposititious claimers of Mr. Robinson's property were identical.

As he talked, it occurred to Vanaman that he was probably telling the truth.

Since the moment when he found himself left at the wharf, and his brain had cleared of that obsessing stupor, all the supernormal quality of the affair had seemed to grow steadily more questionable, fading to unreality like the uncertain memory of a dream—illusion—hallucination; three words that cover a multitude of otherwise inexplicable phenomena.

Certainly the abductors of Robinson and his niece had been no empty fantoms, but flesh-and-blood men. His arm still ached faintly where the tall captain had gripped it. The boat in which Leilah and her uncle were carried off—that was most assuredly a real boat. Captain Porter had seen the real ship to which it had returned. And in good earnest, looking backward, old Robinson might from many of his remarks have been on guard against enemies far more human and credible than the vague, monstrous thing whose apparition haunted the green box.

In fact, what is generally termed "natural common sense" informed the doctor very positively that while he and several other people had been to a certain extent victimized by a singular illusion, to-night's event was—must be—of another order and belonging to the category of purely human and material activities.

Presently Mr. Crosby appeared in the open doorway of the chart-house.

"Black craft with a red dolphin figure-head sighted at Bombay Hook little over an hour ago, sir," he announced cheerfully. "Reported by the tug Jersey Queen. We just now got in touch with her."

"Bombay Hook? Over an hour ago?" repeated Porter sharply. "The Jersey Queen's dreaming! Or else there are two red dolphins cruising down ahead of us. Our boat can't have made Bombay Hook even yet, much less an hour ago. It's rank impossible!"

That lean wreck of a man, Jim Blair, seemed to rouse a trifle.

"Beg pardon, sir," he interposed. "If yer knew *him* yer wouldn't talk of nothing being impossible. That's his ship, sir, with the dolphin to her bow. And she's went down fast, of course, with the outflowing tide."

Porter stared and the sailor stared back composedly; but there was a look in his pale, bleak eyes that after a moment made the captain glance toward Vanaman with a questioning lift of the brows, while his lips silently formed a word. The doctor shook his head.

"I'm not sure," he murmured; then aloud: "Blair, whom do you mean when you speak of 'him'?"

The sailor's mouth widened in a sneering, almost foolish grin.

"If yer don't already know, Dr. Vanaman, yer better off not to."

"But I wish—I demand to know!" All the uncertainty, the unnatural fears and the maddening doubts that had made the last few days an unremitting torment surged up as one great, urgent question. "Blair," he continued tensely, "you are going to tell me every single thing you know about this cursed business, and you are going to tell it now—quick!"

"I ain't got any objection," conceded

the sailor, unexpectedly pliable. "Fer a fact, I'd rather like to get it off my chest. But I warns yer fair, doctor, yer sittin' in a dangerous game if yer listens."

"Tell the truth, my man," put in Porter sternly. "You admit that you know something of the gang who have made off with Mr. Robinson and his niece. That admission alone is enough to jail you. Tell the full truth, and in return we'll do what we can to save you from the law—"

The sailor flung back his head and laughed, a wild peal of merriment with an eldritch note in it that sent a shiver or so down Porter's back. "Law!" Blair gasped presently. "Law—man's law—to deal with *him*, and with me that's marked fer his! Wait! I knows yer don't mean to be funny. It's only that yer don't understand. I'll tell it all straight from the beginning, and whiles I talks yer can listen, and while yer listens we'll all go down the river with the outflowing tide—down the river to *him!*"

That story which Blair the sailor related, standing in the yellow-lighted chart-room, hazy with fog, was a wild, long tale; too long and in many parts too incoherent for a verbatim report of it to be rendered here. Many times Porter, incredulous and increasingly suspicious of the fellow's sanity, would have cut him short; but Vanaman would not have that.

Porter had never sat and watched the sea-tide sweep in, frothing and impossible, miles away from the coast; had never seen fantom waters swirl and mass themselves and give birth to dark terror's self. No matter how mad and wild the tale, in its texture might be facts to explain a mystery fully as wild and mad.

The very beginning of the story, however, sounded sane enough. Early in the previous spring James Blair, A.B., had shipped at Liverpool in the old square-rigged merchant-vessel, Portsmouth Belle, bound with a mixed cargo for British Guiana. Two weeks out the ship encountered a dead calm with heavy, lowering weather, and a few hours later was swept toward the very clouds, as it seemed to Blair, on the crest of an enormous wave, which was in turn succeeded by two lesser ones.

"That's probably true enough," commented Porter. "Lisbon reported a moderate-sized tidal wave last May. Did some damage to shipping in waters north and east of the Azores, too."

The Portsmouth Belle, continued Blair, survived the greater wave and its followers, and also, laid to under storm staysails, outlived the tornadolike gale which ensued. When the wind somewhat lessened, its direction, being N. N. E., the ship was allowed to run before it, and very soon thereafter was found to be scudding through a sea whose billows were curiously flattened and without foam or crests. The water, in fact, proved to be heavy with a grayish, ashlike substance, and being in the first mate's watch Blair learned from him that the substance was indeed ash and cinders of volcanic origin.

The wind died still further, the sea became practically flat, and the Portsmouth Belle for a long time forced her way with great difficulty through this scum of ash, which by test was in many places found to be over a foot thick. The sky was continually overcast, the heat well-nigh unendurable, and a whisper went about the ship that the navigating officers were, to use Blair's phrase, "going it blind," due to some magnetic injury to the compasses. Speaking no other vessels, and being unsupplied with wireless, their exact position through these days was extremely uncertain.

May 17, when Blair understood they should have sighted the low peak of Corzo in the Azores, they were still surrounded by an unbroken horizon of sickly gray, the sea being dotted at one point, however, by a short, low bar of black which proved on closer approach to be a small island. Mr. Kersarge, the first mate, informed Blair that this was in all probability new land, flung up by the submarine earthquake and eruption which had caused the tidal, or more properly speaking, the seismic wave.

Captain Jessamy elected to go ashore here, and Blair was one of the party of five seamen who accompanied him.

Rowing in that ash-encrusted sea was like propelling a boat through thick, half-frozen slush, and the journey of, say, a half-thousand yards required over an hour of strenu-

ous exertion. They arrived at last, however, and Captain Jessamy was first to set foot on the strange bit of vapor-steaming rock extruded by the convulsive forces at work below.

Blair was the only one to follow him, and for an excellent reason. The other four seamen were all barefooted; but Blair, "tipped off," as he phrased it, by the mate, had brought along a pair of shore-boots. The rock was still hot enough to preclude any comfort in walking about, even for a man shod in heavy leather, and with naked feet the adventure became one of downright torture.

"And me," said Blair, "bringin' them boots along just to walk myself straight through the gates of hell! I wisht the old man had died before he ever seen that island! I wisht Mr. Kersarge had died before he ever tipped me off to take them boots along! I wisht—"

"That will do, my man," Porter cut in coldly. "Cursing your officers will not finish this long-winded yarn you're spinning. Anyway, I fail to see how a volcanic island near the Azores can bear on the kidnaping of a bloomin' millionaire down the Delaware."

"Yer will see, sir. But if yer don't want to hear it, I'll lay off—"

"Let him finish, Captain Porter—please?" intervened the doctor. "Get ahead, Blair, and make it as short as you can to save time."

"I will, sir, though it seems funny to talk of savin' time when yer tellin' of *his* doings. What's time to him? Why a matter of twenty thousand years or so ain't no more to him than five minutes is to you and me. Time! All right, sir; I'll get under way again."

Near the center of the island, from which Captain Jessamy kept a safe distance, fearing poisonous vapors, were some masses of brilliantly scarlet rock, in form and juxtaposition vaguely suggesting the shapes of ruined buildings.

"Scarlet?" repeated the doctor.

"Red," said the sailor. "Red as new blood that's just been shed; red as the writin' that lays across what he's took again for his own; red as the ten red cities—ah, yer has seen a thing or two fer yer own-self, doctor, ain't yer?"

"Never mind what I may have seen. Get on with your story."

"Oh, I'm tellin' yer fast enough. It was while the old man—beg pardon, Captain Porter, sir; I mean Captain Jessamy—it was while he was peerin' at them old red walls through his binoculars that I first seen it. There was chunks and roundish balls of lava layin' all about in the wet ash. Black they was mostly, with dull red specks. This here was different. It was green—bright green, like grass almost; grass that blood has been sprinkled over in pretty little shiny red drops. And it were shaped real regular, almost like a box.

"'Captain Jessamy, sir,' says I, 'can I carry this here along when we goes? I could hollow it out to a box like, and maybe sell it ashore.' And the old man, he laughs and says: 'Sure. Help yerself to anything you find on this land, Blair. I reckon nobody won't come around claimin' no property yer removes from here.'

"Just like that. He reckoned nobody would be wanting or claiming it from me. So I wraps it up in my shirt, because it's too hot to hold, and just like that I walks through the gates of hell, sirs. Straight, plumb through the gates of hell!"

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

Speaking of Conscience

by Courtney Ryley Cooper

IT took a guy like me to get along with Ed Steele. Not that Ed was rough, tough or ugly. But he had a conscience, and if there's anything that can cause trouble just at the psychological moment when you've got the sucker all primed to sign on the dotted line, and thereby put his John Henry on what seems to be a contract for a gilt-edged, double-decked, washing, drying and cleaning machine, but what is really a six months' promissory-note, discountable at any bank, it's one of those blamed New England consciences. And Ed had one, rock bound, copper riveted and with asbestos padding between all the seams.

Conscience may be all right in its place. I'm not saying anything about that. Probably we couldn't get along without it in the general scheme of things, but with Ed and me it was a thing of juty and a jaw forever. I guess Ed and me 've used up enough conversation over that blamed conscience of his to sell the New York subway eight times over.

Why, one day in Denver, I saw that man sit down and actually cry after we'd gotten up at five o'clock in the morning and argued a bird from Fort Collins into the belief that the Larimer Street viaduct was our own private and personal property, bringing in five thousand dollars a month on tolls, and that the only reason we were selling at a sacrifice was because the altitude was bad on our hearts, and the doc had said we ought to go to a lower climate. Actually cried, that man did, with the tears rolling down on the hunk of bills we'd taken away from the Fort Collin's Horn o' Plenty, and then, what'd he do but up and buy one of these " There's No Place Like Home " mottoes and send it to the sucker to ease off that conscience.

" Maybe it 'll teach him a lesson," says Ed mournful-like, as we mailed it in the depot. " Maybe, if he'd had one of those things on the wall, he'd never left home. And if he'd never left home, he'd never got hooked up with us and bought that viaduct. And, as long as I can think that maybe I'm keeping him out of trouble in the future, I don't feel so bad about selling him something that the city of Denver spend a couple of years building and naturally wants to hang on to, no matter what some guy from Fort Collins may say."

So, from that, it's a cinch to get a slant on what kind of a bird Ed Steele was. Other people might say that he was as crooked as a dog's hind leg, and willing to trim anything from a hat to his best friend; but I know better. Ed never took anything away from anybody in his life that he didn't give something back. Which leads up to the case in point, as the last lawyer who got us out on bail used to say.

We'd pulled just about everything that was pullable, from legs to the green-goods

game, and, seeing that the last change of names we'd made had thrown the bunch pretty well off our track, Ed decided that it was almost time for us to settle down and get into some business that was clean and decent. That was exactly what I was looking for. Besides, just the week before, I'd met a bird from Quagmire—just on the line between Wyoming and Colorado—who'd got a little funny with his gun, and wanted to sell out.

Good proposition, too. One roulette-table, guaranteed ninety-five per cent for the house, three drop cases, two guys working the shell game, one three-card monte-table and as swell a faro layout as you ever set your lamps on. And when Ed began this decent stuff, I was on his neck like butter on a hot stove. But Ed scratched his head.

"Lucius," he said—my name is Lucius, and in spite of it I still love my mother—"Lucius, I don't know what to say. There we'd have a home, with a fireplace and all that sort of thing. But gambling's against the law."

"Don't worry about that," I came back at him. "I've got all the dope in that direction framed up like a recipe in a Boston cook-book. The sheriff's all to the candy. He'll protect us from everything up to and including smallpox for twenty per cent of the gross."

But, as I might have known, that wasn't what was on Ed's mind. Old Man Conscience had shied into the spotlight, and Ed was fretting over the fact that we would be taking a lot of money away from the poor geeks who were trying to take it away from us. But the game was big, and I did some thinking. Then I eased an arm around Ed's shoulder.

"Forget it, kid," says I. "They'll get something for every dollar they put into the game. It may not be much—some little gewgaw to give them pleasant recollections of their night with the tiger—but it 'll be more than they ever got out of any gambling joint before. And of course there's always the chance that they'll win."

So with that I let Ed down out of the clouds and onto the ground floor. Two weeks later we were the owners and proprietors of as fine a little take-it-away joint in Quagmire as you ever saw. Nothing rough, nothing out of the way; nothing that could offend the gentlest nature or cause perturbation to the most delicate sensibilities. And that's what really made the place so high-class and so soothing to Ed's New England conscience.

The only thing we sold over the bar was near-beer and ice-cream soda, and Ed did most of the work there, when he wasn't officiating at the fake-table, where every customer of our little games of chance got some sort of a souvenir, ranging all the way from a package of prunes to a set of Japanese dishes and a dill pickle. It was just the sort of thing that delighted Ed's heart. He gaveth while I tooketh away.

And business was good. There was a lot of trade between Denver and Casper, automobile parties going to the oil-fields and the general truck business of the main Wyoming-Colorado road, and everybody had money. Another nice thing about it was the fact that while Ed wouldn't permit a drop of the demoniacal stuff in the house, Bootleg Bert from Leadville ran a Sightless Parker right next door, with a working agreement between us, of which I said nothing, absolutely nothing to Edward, and he said nothing to me.

As for Bootleg Bert, he was content to get 'em going and coming. First they'd roam into his haven of restlessness and pipe up the desire to look upon the wheel when it whirled, then they'd come over to our place. Following which Ed would give 'em near-beer, and plenty of talk on the way in, and a souvenir and more talk on the way out, while I'd take most of their money in between. Following that they'd go back to Bootleg Bert's to forget the fact that all they'd got out of our place was a lot of stale cigar smoke, some education, and a patent, sawdust-filled doll that opened and closed its eyes and said "papa."

From all of which you can gather that things worked well. For two months I didn't hear a word out of Ed about his conscience. Never a peep. Slept like a baby, ate like a horse, and was gaining weight. Then along came Horace Q. Keever.

Mysterious sort of duck. Roamed into the place one night, cold sober, ate an ice-cream cone, talked to Ed a minute, then walked over to where I was negotiating the wheel and pulled out a roll of bills that would make a rhinoceros bilious.

"Gimme a thousand bucks' worth of chips," he said in an offhand voice, and whisked a couple of five-hundred-dollar bills off the roll. I doled them out and then looked over at Ed, who 'd heard the order, and who almost swallowing the bar-towel to keep down his excitement.

The visitor rang his fingers along the edges of the chips, listening to 'em click for a minute, then pushed the whole shebang on the board, with the command. "Let 'em lay where they stop."

I wouldn't have moved 'em for a million. They had all bunched up on the red, and all I had to do was to turn the wheel and put on the pressure. Which I did. Then, seeing that by some strange freak of fortune, he'd lost his bet, I raked in the chips. But did it worry him? It did not.

"Funny how the game goes," he announced, still in that offhand voice; "you never can tell."

"One gets you twenty-eight," I began to drone. "One gets you twenty-eight. Pick your numbers and make your bets, then watch the turning of the wheel. I'm here to lose, you're here to win."

But he just looked at me and grinned again.

"Not me! I've got a little rule. Never more than a thousand a night. It's a bad habit to get into. As long as I play this little system I'll never go broke."

"No?" I was gulping a little. "Suppose—"

"I lost all the time? Well," and he shrugged his shoulders, "I guess I could stand it."

"You must be a millionaire."

"Oh, I'd hardly say that." Then he gave me that genial grin again and turned away to where Ed was waiting for him with a set of mechano toys for the children and a pound of chocolates. A little bunch had gathered around the wheel, and they were all buzzing at once, under their breath. Slim Pickens, the baggageman, edged up close with an air of several drinks and a good deal of authority.

"I know who he is," he whispered. "Oil man. Name's Horace Q. Keever."

"How do you know?"

"Seen him when he came in this afternoon on the three twenty. Wasn't dressed up like he is now, and had on a pair of gray field-shoes, all splashed up with oil like he'd been around a gusher somewhere. How come it that I got his name? I saw him register at the hotel, that's how."

Well, that didn't excite us much. There were plenty of oil men with lots of money dropping in every day or two. That's about the only oil excitement we had—taking away the cash from the people that had made it out of the wells up Casper way. It never had struck any of us that the other way 'd be worth fooling with. The fellow who got money in that fashion had to take a lot of risks and do a lot of work. All we had to do was to sit steady in the boat and let 'em come along and get trimmed.

Just the same, I couldn't help feeling a lot of interest in Horace Q. Keever, principally through the hope that he'd come back and lay down another thousand to help along the good cause. Which he did; and when he pulled out that roll of bills it seemed to me that it was bigger than ever.

I piled into bed that night before Ed could ask me any questions. I was afraid that his blooming conscience might begin to work again, and suggest that Horace Q. be allowed to win a few times, just to keep him in a good humor.

On the third evening there was Horace Q. back again, to eat his ice-cream cone, chin a while with Ed, and then come on over to the roulette-wheel for his nightly trimming. He got it; but the only excitement it caused was on the part of the gang that had gathered to see him lose it. By that time it had become sort of a habit with me to rake in the chips, and I'd gathered almost as much of an offhand attitude as the gentleman himself. But not Ed.

Fact is, something seemed to have been eating on Ed for the last couple of days. I'd noticed the old rings beginning to form under his eyes, like they used to do back in the days when he'd sob out his soul after

we'd promised to help out some overburdened person by relieving him of the weight of his roll. A shaky feeling began to chase up and down my spine. I could see that something was working in Ed's mind, and I was betting ten to one that it was his conscience.

But this time, it seems I was wrong. After I'd hurried to bed that night and pretended to be snoring before I even hit the pillow, Ed came in, turned on the light, roamed around the room, and mumbled to himself a long time before he began to undress. Then, finally, when he'd climbed in, he turned and tossed and kicked the covers around for half an hour, hoping all the time that he'd wake me up. At last he jabbed me in the ribs.

"Lucius!"

"Yeh."

"Are you awake?"

"No; I'm dead and buried. What do you think I'm doing, talking in my sleep?"

Much silence. Then:

"Lucius!"

"Uhuh."

"What do you suppose that an oil-promoter can be up to in taking out a lease on the Bar T Ranch?"

"What's that?" I sat up in bed now.

Certainly, if there was one thing in the world that was useless, hopeless and beyond redemption, it was the Bar T Gulleys: soapweed, no water, no grass, no nothing; it was about the worst piece of disaster this side of Death Valley. And what was more, everybody knew it.

I grunted. "Who's been kidding you?"

"Nobody. That's just the trouble. that's why I'm worried."

"How so? Who's—"

"Horace Q. Keever."

"Gosh!" I wouldn't let myself believe it for a minute. "How'd you find it out?"

"Asked at the Wilkins Realty Company to-day. He's leased it on one of these blanket affairs—you know: all things on top of the earth and all things beneath the earth. Says he's going to raise sheep."

"But is he?"

"There you are. Slim Pickens said he was an oil man, didn't he? Well, I didn't pay much attention to that until he showed up the second night. Then I began to wonder what an oil man was doing, staying over in Quagmire more than one day. So when I handed him the palaver and the heart's-ease, I asked him a few questions about himself. He told me he was a real-estate dealer from Kianna, Iowa, and that he was new out in this country; just looking around for some investments. Then he came through with the information that he thought the Bar T Ranch might make a good proposition for some guy from Iowa who'd tired of the corn tassels and wanted the free and open air. It didn't set well with me, so I started on his trail. Saw him hanging around the Wilkins Realty Company to-day, and after he'd gone, I eased in there and got the dope. What do you suppose the game is?"

"You've got me. But I know one thing: that bird never was in Iowa in his life. He hasn't got the ear-marks. Did you ever see anybody from Kianna who'd part from a thousand bucks without dropping dead?"

"Did you ever," Ed came back at me, "see anybody from Kianna who had a thousand bucks to part from?"

Then we both rolled over and kidded each other that we were asleep. I don't know what Ed was thinking about, but I know that before morning I had figured out more ways to become thoroughly acquainted with Horace Q. Keever than you could shake a stick at. All of which didn't amount to a hill of beans. Because when we faced each other at breakfast, Ed gave me one of those rock-bound looks from the coast of conscience and says:

"Lucius"—whenever he was real serious he made it sound like Lucious—"I want you to make me a promise."

"About what?"

"About what I told you last night. I know what you've been thinking."

"Well?"

"It can't be done."

"What can't be done?"

"I can't stand for it, Lucius." Ed wagged his head. "We're leading a square, straight life here, and I'm happy. And I can't let you start on any kind of a wild-goose chase to steal this man's land away from him or take his money or—"

"Say"—I spilled some egg on the tablecloth—"what are you talking about?"

"Nothing in particular, and a lot in generalities. I didn't go to sleep when you thought I did. And I found out in a very little while that you were awake. And Lucius, when you stay awake nights, there's something in the wind besides air. So I'm just coppering all bets. I want you to make me a promise that whatever money or benefits accrue through our acquaintanceship and pleasant companionship with Horace Q. Keever shall be absolutely on the level."

"But for the love of Pete, you're not going to run him out of our Hall of Infamy when he comes in there to leave us his money?"

"Certainly not. That's perfectly legitimate. Besides, he gets a return for all his money, a souvenir, a bit of brightness to cheer his sober hours, and plenty of friendship and congeniality. No, there's nothing wrong about that whatever. But as to the other—"

What on earth could you do with a man whose mind worked like that? I promised. That night I saw Horace Q. come into the Fake-Shop, drop his usual thousand, and walk out again without even cheeping a word to him that I'd like to spend a few pleasant hours in his company. The next night the same, and the next after that. Then—

It was Ed, Ed waving goggle-eyed to me from behind the near-beer bar when the evening guests departed, waving and making motions. I hurried to him—to find him gasping for breath.

"I've got the whole thing!" he bubbled. "Oh, Lucius, it's awful!"

"Who's dead?"

"I am—nearly—from excitement. I suppose it was the wrong thing to do, and to be really honest, I feel terrible about it, and I never should have read the thing; but actually my eyes were on it before I knew what I was doing, and—"

"Tell the story first, and the details afterward."

Ed just looked at me and made motions with his mouth. Then, staring all about him like the guy in the movies just before he walks in to rob the bank, he pulled a letter from under his bar-towel.

"Horace Q. Keever dropped it to-night, just as he left the joint. I know I oughtn't have read it, and I wouldn't if I'd stopped to think, but—"

"Oh, shut up." Then I opened the letter and read it:

MY DEAR HORACE:

Thanks for your code-telegram telling me that you had obtained the blanket lease on the Bar T Ranch. That cinches everything. Keep on making the stall that you're from Iowa, and that you're going to use the place as a sheep ranch. Nobody there should suspect you.

How that place up there has escaped the Standard Oil Company and the rest of the big operators is more than I know. The one test that I ran down—fifty feet—showed me conclusively that the sand is absolutely the same as in the Rock Creek and other big fields, with the exception, of course, that they have to go down three thousand feet to get oil, where we will have to go down only a matter of a hundred and fifty.

Keep things dark, and grab up all the land you can get hold of. Don't tip it to a soul. The minute that's done, we're lost.

JAMES V. BARNETT.

I just stood and gurgled. Ed was doing the same thing. Finally I looked at him, and he looked at me.

"Well," he asked.

"Take off that bar-apron," I ordered him; "we're going down to see Mr. Keever."

Which we did. We found him in his pajamas, smoking a cigar that smelled like a hundred dollars. I stepped on Ed's foot to keep him quiet while I had my say, then I pulled out the letter.

"Mr. Keever," I said, "it's all off."

He took one look at the letter and waved his arms like a windmill.

"Where'd you get that?"

"You dropped it up in our spread-eagle joint. And we just thought we'd come down and return it to you like a couple of good boys, and then go and tell the rest of the town what's doing."

"Oh, boys!" his voice was like a tombstone works. "Let me ask you: don't do that! Please don't do that. Why—why, it 'd mean—it 'd mean—"

"We know what it 'd mean. But this is a nice, select, home-loving little community here that resents people coming in from the outside and playing funny tricks on 'em,

and it sort of frowns on anything that hasn't home talent in it. That's why we thought, as a sort of reward for our true and faithful services, and, of course, for our silence, that you might announce us in on the gound floor, and mark us down for—well, say, about six thousand dollars' worth of stock."

"That was the amount that Horace Q. had lost with us, and we figured that we weren't taking any chances. But the ranch buyer from Kianna, Iowa, just stared.

"Why, gentlemen," he managed to get out after a while, "you must understand that I represent big people. Six thousand dollars doesn't mean anything to us at all. And, besides, what insurance would six thousand dollars be? None; absolutely none. A person with only that amount of money in a company wouldn't feel the compulsion of silence. You'd sell it to-morrow for twelve thousand, and the whole town would know it in an hour. I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I—I can't do it."

"Twenty-five thousand wouldn't interest you?" Ed kicked me on the ankle and butted in. "We—of course we realize your position. But, much as it hurts me to say so, Mr. Keever, we've got you in a hole."

"Perhaps so." He looked at Ed like a wounded dove. "But if I'm not mistaken, you're the kind of a man I could trust absolutely to help me, whether I gave him any reward or not. Do you know, Mr. Steele, I feel sure that if I asked you not to say a word about this, I could rely on it that you wouldn't ruin the hopes of a corporation, and that you wouldn't allow your partner, no matter how grasping he may be, to—"

"Mr. Keever," I cut in real quickly, "suppose we make that fifty thousand bucks. That's a lot of money. A couple of fellows like us aren't going to take any chances on spilling the beans when we've got fifty thousand stuck in it. Now—"

"Gentlemen," Mr. Keever had backed against the bed and stood there rubbing his hands and looking at the ceiling, "I think I know my people pretty well. There's not a man in the company who is not a millionaire. Naturally they don't want to fool around with bagatelle. I can safely say that they would refuse to allow you to come in for that money. I might be able to promise that I could show them the light if you made it—well, say, double the amount."

Three hours later, Ed and I said the word. The next morning we slapped a mortgage on the Palace of Pleasure, borrowed fifteen thousand, put the bee on the sheriff for his share of the gross for the last two months, and drew out our balance at the bank. But we figured it was worth it.

By afternoon we'd got all our cash together except that fifteen thousand, and the bank had promised it at three. According to our agreement with Mr. Keever, so that no more conferences would be held, and no possible chance of any one overhearing our deal, he was to come into the joint at eight o'clock that night, slap down a wad of hundred-dollar bills on the table—in which would be the stock-certificate stuck between the bills, and I was to rake it in and slip it down behind the table and examine it to see that it was all right, while he was counting his chips. Then he was to win on the star number, and I was to pay him a hundred thousand dollars in cash. All of which seemed fine and lovely.

But, as I was saying, there was still that fifteen thousand. Along about a quarter of three, Ed and I pulled away from the Palace of Pleasure and slid down to the bank. The president did the kotow to us and took us in his private office. Then Ed and I made out the notes and all that bunk and slipped 'em to the guardian of the exchequer. He gave us a bow or two and went out to the cage.

Ed and I sat there, lamping around to see what we could pipe off, and sort of absent-mindedly Ed picked up a file of these here "Wanted—One Hundred Dollars Reward" things that are always bobbing around to remind you that maybe you're doing a star part in one of 'em.

But at that I didn't pay much attention to him and his reading matter. If it 'd been the sheriff's office, I might have been more interested. But I knew that we hadn't been cracking any safes or pushing a gun in a cashier's face or writing phony names on little pieces of paper, and it didn't fret me in the least. But something about it seemed to get Ed. All of a sudden I saw him sort of jerk up in his chair and look at

a picture. Then he let go of a long sigh and sat there like the principal part in a popular funeral. I leaned over.

"What's doing?" I says, sort of offhand.

Ed had the file open to a bald-headed guy who was wanted somewhere for something that I couldn't make out, because he closed up on me like a clam and tossed the darned thing over to the other side of the desk.

"Oh, nothing," he came back in an offhand voice, and then the president walked in and handed us the fifteen grand. We rose and paid our respects, and promised to pay back the money. Then we started back to the Fake-Shop.

I never saw a man who could change so fast as Ed Steele. Fifteen minutes before he had been laughing like a rube with a joke-book. Now he was as sour as a pickle factory. I grabbed him by the shoulder and swung him around.

"What's eating on you?"

Ed just gave me one look and walked on.

"My conscience," he says.

"About what?"

"Lucius"—and I thought he was going to die that minute—"you don't understand complicated things."

"Nope. But I can make a stab at it. What's—"

"It's awful. Awful!" We were almost to the Fake-Shop now. "I never had a heavier burden on my mind than right now. I—"

"But what is it? What the—"

We'd turned in the door by this time, and a few guys were standing around and talking wasn't very easy. Something 'd happened; I could see that sticking out all over. But what was it?

Every time I got a chance, I slid over to the fake-table where Ed was shining up his gewgaws and tried to draw it out of him. But he'd only stand there and stare at me. Once his face lighted up and he said:

"Lucius, a man with a conscience has got faith. And a man with faith has got a tremendous advantage. And maybe faith will find a way."

"To what?"

But he shook his head again.

"It's too complicated, Lucius."

You can't do anything with a guy like that. I went back to the roulette-wheel and skinned a few suckers, trying all the time to think back and see if I could figure out what 'd happened. And the more I figured, the more I realized that Ed's glumness had started about the time he saw that reward-sheet. But why that should cut any ice was more 'n I could figure. I didn't know any bald-headed guys who were in trouble. And what if I did? It was a cinch that neither one of 'em was us—and the rest didn't make any difference.

After a while Ed went out of the Fake-Shop and stalled around with a few of his pals; and it gave me more time to think. And the more I thought, the more I wondered about that bald-headed guy. But it didn't do me much good.

I tried to get another whack at Ed, but there wasn't anything stirring. He didn't come back to the emporium of chance until after he'd eaten his snack and was ready for the evening's distribution. I'd have given a half-year's growth to see what was in his eyes; but no use. There was a gang around the wheel, and I was too busy raking in the shekels.

The time went by and eight o'clock came. And with it, in sailed Horace Q. Keever, with a grip in one hand and the other fishing for the bundle of bills in a coat-pocket.

"Just thought I'd say so-long," he greeted me. "Got to get away on the eight twenty-one, and I've just got time for one spin of the wheel. So let's make it a fat one."

"You're on," I came back. "Why not play the star number?"

"You mean the one that 'll break the house if I win?"

"Oh, hardly that bad," I came back. "But I'll admit it 'll bend us a bit."

"I'm on." He tossed the bundle of money on the table, and the crowd jammed up to see the play. I gave the stuff the once over under cover and saw that the certificate was there, and looked up kind of smiling in Horace Q.'s face. There was something about that face that was familiar!

But I couldn't grab it. I tried again. Nothing doing. There was something I ought to be able to recognize; but I couldn't make it. I gave the wheel a spin and put on

the pressure. The crowd jammed tighter than ever, then let out a gasp like a dying whale. Horace Q. had hit!

He gave just one little stage-whoop, and stuck out his hand for the money. Then he looked at the clock and jammed the bills that I'd handed him into a pocket.

"I've got to make a rush for it," he says.

"You know it," says Ed, helping him with his grip and edging him along. "Hey, boys, let the man through. Hear me, let this man through."

But the crowd had got excited and was jamming around yelling and sticking out their hands to congratulate him. Ed, pushing and shoving him, was trying to get him through, but the crowd was all around him now. And then—

Somebody's hand slipped and hit his hat. It came off—and with it came a toupee! And just then I saw that geek's face, and I knew! It was the one on that reward sheet, and there wasn't anything more needed, as far as I was concerned.

Oil stock, oil lands, oil gushers—they were the bunk; Ed and me had a bum certificate, and a crook had our cash! I gave just one jump and cleared the roulette-table. Then I dived head first into the crowd, spread 'em fanwise, and took a wallop at the bald-headed guy who was struggling his best for a getaway.

I missed. I swung again, then something jammed itself in front of me—Ed Steele. What was more, he was mad, and showed it. And what was still more, he smashed me straight in the jaw with a right uppercut, and as I went to the floor, I heard him yell to the bald-headed geek to beat it.

I tried to get up. Something plopped on top of me and walloped me again. It was Ed. I yelled at him, but it didn't do any good. He stuck his hat in my mouth and whanged me again, while outside I heard a taxicab chortle away, and I knew that a bald-headed guy and our hundred thousand bucks was in it. Then I passed out.

Ed had me in a back room when I came to, with a towel on my head and a piece of beefsteak on one eye. And when I opened the good one, I saw the most sorrowful face I ever saw on a human being in my life.

"Lucius!" says Ed, and the tears were right at the surface. "I wish I'd let you go on with it."

"You're darned right you do!" I snapped back at him. "Here we are, a couple of fine goofs, slipping our kale to a common, ordinary forger or somethin', and when I try to stop it you wallop me in the chin and help him make his getaway. Of all the—"

But Ed shook his head.

"Nope, that ain't it, Lucius," he gulped. "That ain't it at all. I thought I was doing right, but I done wrong. All wrong; and he's gone now, hunting parts unknown, and I can't repair the damage."

"Damage?" I just sat and stared at him with my one good eye. "What damage? Seems to me that the damage has been done to us."

"Nope." Ed swallowed hard. "It's complicated, Lucius, but I'll do my best to explain it to you. I got that face the minute I saw it this afternoon, see? But I had made my promise, and my conscience wouldn't let me do anything but keep it. I had my duty to do by ourselves; my conscience wouldn't let me forget that—"

"But—"

"Of course, I could have stopped it all by turning him up as a crook, but my conscience wouldn't let me. We wouldn't like to be turned up, now, would we, Lucius? So I figured there'd be a crowd, and that I could pick his pocket easy enough in the jam when he turned away. And that's why I stopped you; I didn't want the poor fellow pinched, Lucius. It wouldn't have been right, but—but I wish now I'd done it. You see—like a chief mourner at a camp-meeting—that guy pulled out a roll of bills as big as a horse's neck. "I—I just dived at random and got my hands on everything I could grab. And—"

"And you got our money?"

Ed's face was longer 'n the Lincoln Highway.

"That's just the trouble, Lucius," he groaned. "I got our money and—he must have been somewhere else just before he saw us—because I got sixty thousand more with it! And—and he's gone—and I can't give it back!"

What're you going to do with a guy like that?

The Big Boss in Bronze

by Holman Day

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

RETURNING to his home town, Canton Center, from overseas, his courage strengthened by the inspiration of a statue of Washington, "The Big Boss in Bronze," Barron Douglass heard from Squire Cassius Nile of dark doings brewing in the town. Before his enlistment Douglass had been accused of the robbery of five thousand in War-Chest funds from Dr. Abner Sawtell, whose son, Ray, was interested in Nina Bingham, niece of the money-lender, Swinton Tingley, who had ruined the Douglasses.

The miser had called in his money; men had been seen lurking about the house—and Barron purchased a revolver at Dustin's store, which he gave to Nina for protection. Then, later, in the presence of Dr. Sawtell and Douglass, Tingley disclosed the hiding-place of his wealth—a panel in the wall.

Following these events three visitors called at Lawyer Nile's office: a woman who offered a five-hundred-dollar retainer for a defense against possible accusation of husband murder; Nina herself, and lastly Swinton Tingley, whom Barron thrust into the street, following the miser's insult and blow. Tingley had Douglass arrested, but Nile modified the charge to simple assault, that night the young man watching the Tingley mansion in Nina's behalf.

Overhearing a conversation between two men which seemed to implicate some unknown individual, suddenly he heard shots from the house—two men rushed out, one throwing something into the distance, and as Douglass dashed inside he heard behind him the sounds of a scuffle. Within doors he found tragedy: Tingley dead, his face frightfully disfigured; Nina in a faint. An irruption of the villagers, including Azor Speed, blacksmith, was followed by the arrival of Crockett, county medical examiner, whose examination tended to show that the miser's old fusee had not been responsible for his death. At a general meeting at town hall five hundred dollars' reward was offered, and a detective, one Warren Odlin, engaged. But it was plain the townspeople suspected Douglass. And the circumstantial evidence was strong.

Nile had publicly rebuked a street gathering for malicious gossip, when suddenly Douglass appeared, handcuffed to Odlin.

"What does this mean?" demanded the squire.

"He's been took up for the murder of Swint Tingley," said Nute, the constable, manifestly elevated by his participation in a real case.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BADGE OF CHIVALRY.

"CHARGED—merely charged with the offense," corrected the more cautious detective. "The evidence I have collected warrants an arrest, Mr. Nile."

"Confound it, you have no evidence, sir! What's the evidence?" demanded the lawyer, in his rage forgetting his standing as counsel, debarred from precipitate prying into the State's secrets at that time.

Mr. Odlin smiled indulgently. "The State expects to produce enough evidence to hold the prisoner for the action of the grand jury, sir. You'll have to excuse me, on professional grounds, from telling you what that evidence is."

Squire Nile took the young man's free hand in his, and marched along by his protégé's side. "Well, bub, the old muskrats of this town have been burrowing under the bank, and we have been dropped into the drink! Never mind! The water is cold right now, but we'll strike out and swim as best we can."

This story began in The Argosy for February 28.

Detective Odlin informed the squire that the prisoner was to be taken directly to the shire town, by orders of the county attorney, to whom the evidence in the case had been submitted.

Lawyer Nile had recovered his placidity of manner.

On the train he sat in with the officer and the prisoner, and chatted about matters wholly removed from the unpleasant business which had made the journey necessary.

At the shire town they found the county attorney waiting with the judge of the municipal court in chambers.

"It will do us no good to fight 'em at this stage of the game," the lawyer confided to his client. "To be sure, we might draw out a little of the State's case against you, but they've got enough in the way of motive and opportunity to hold you for the grand jury."

He checked Douglass's protestations. "I know, boy! But that fat detective is dealing with the obvious, and has a lot of that stuff up his sleeve. You and I must bide our time and dig up and display what's underneath. It's a dreadful thing, this arrest. But an arrest is like lancing a sore swelling! It hurts like the mischief. But from now on Canton will begin to feel easier. Persecution raises up friends for the victim. Leave it to me!"

Therefore, Squire Nile rose and waived the reading of the warrant and offered the plea of not guilty in behalf of his client.

The offense charged was murder, and no bail could be accepted.

Sergeant Douglass was lodged in the county jail.

The old squire, waiting for the night train back to Canton, sat with the prisoner as long as the jail rules permitted.

"Pity and common sense and decency are still left in some folks of the town," he insisted in the course of his efforts to cheer Douglass. "It has needed something like this to stir 'em out of the jealous, selfish ways they have wallowed along in for so long. I reckon you have been called on for another sacrifice, bub, in addition to the one you made when you answered the great call. We're going to see you go free and spotless. Then they'll wake up and be ashamed of what the habit of spite has made 'em do."

"With me penned up like this, the burden falls on you," said the young student, tears of gratitude in his eyes.

"Burden! Phush! It's a privilege. Haven't I told you before that I want to dig in Canton? Well, now, I have two utensils for the job—a guilty widow and an innocent victim. And I guess the widow was only a tool for evil, as I want to make her a tool for good! She doesn't impress me as a self-acting proposition."

He rose from the stool and grasped the grating of the door, making ready to rattle the signal for release.

"Just a moment, Squire Nile!" Douglass pulled something from his pocket and pressed it into the lawyer's hand. "You'll find the order written on the blank, turning the whole sum over to you."

"Order? What way! What say!"

"It's rising three hundred and eighty dollars—my bonus and what I was able to save across, sir. I realize that it will go only a mighty little way in paying expenses in my defense, but—"

The lawyer scaled the bank-book upon the cot in the cell. "What makes you think that I need money? Didn't you see me take in a fifty-dollar fee only the other day?" he demanded whimsically.

"I know! But don't add to my mental troubles by refusing to accept this part payment—please don't."

"Why, my boy, I'm rich," blazed the old lawyer. He rattled the door with all his strength. "The idea! Sticking a handful of small change up under my nose in this fashion! You have treated me as you would a shyster attorney. Good night! Mind your manners better!"

The hurrying turnkey came and clacked back the broad bolt.

"Good night!" repeated the squire, pounding his heels on the flagging as he marched away.

Young Douglass did not reply; he could not manage his voice; that peppery rebuke had shocked him into silence. He stumbled to his cot and sat upon the edge of it, full of grieved wonder that his offer had been

treated with such angry disdain. He had done his best. He had tried all his life to do his best! He felt his grit melt and his courage go to pieces. In this new spirit of utter loneliness he wept weakly.

He tried to get command of himself when the cell door opened. In the gloom, his eyes blurred by tears, he did not recognize at once the person who had entered.

Then a firm but gentle hand was set upon his head and pressed till his face was turned to meet the face that bent above.

It was Squire Nile. The smile he gave Douglass was both apologetic and compassionate. "Son, I couldn't run away and leave you guessing what sort of a barking dog fit it was that tackled me all of a sudden. When a man stops being honest and straightforward and tries to bluff, it's generally all off with him. He usually makes believe that he has lost his temper —and that's poor veneer!"

"I have asked you to be honest with me, and I was starting in to be dishonest with you. Poor policy, bub! I'm ashamed."

He sat down beside Douglass and put an arm around the boy's shoulder.

"It's this way, Barron, my son! Perhaps I'm a little speck sensitive about my financial condition—and then again perhaps I'm not! Let it stand that way—impartial like a judge's charge to a jury. But there's one point on which I can be honest with you! I'm poorer 'n an off ox in Pooduck. Some of the judges say that I'm the only lawyer in the whole State who hasn't a side-line to bring in money. Even when money is owed to me, I'm a poor collector. If a critter comes to me without money he can have law just the same.

"I won't take a crooked case. Please forget that I have a certain widow for a client till you know better why I have taken up that cudgel. The lawyers laugh at my jury pants and my steel suit. But I'd rather shine that way than in good clothes that I couldn't pay for.

"I have stepped back here to let you know that we're poor cusses together, bub. Keep your little treasure. If we have to use it—why, we'll have to, that's all!

"We're up against the State and the State's money and an attorney-general who wears creased pants and a flower in his buttonhole and who brags that he has not lost a conviction in a murder case since he was elected. It'll be a shame to put a dent in a record like that, even to set an innocent man free.

"But stand up here in front of me, lad! Put your hand in mine. Some day it's going to be Nile & Douglass, Attorneys-at-Law. Just now it's Nile and Douglass against the whole damn' kit an' caboodle—State, money, spite, lies, creased pants, and buttonhole bouquets! What say!"

But once again young Douglass found himself unable to say! Suddenly, he leaned forward and kissed the old man's wrinkled cheek. Perhaps Sergeant Douglass was prompted to do that by the example set him in France when a general in horizon blue pinned the cross upon the sergeant's khaki blouse.

At any rate, in his heart, Sergeant Douglass had pinned upon the faded old frock-coat of Cassius Nile the honor badge that is deserved by the chivalry of unselfish friendship.

CHAPTER X.

HIS WITNESSES.

AFTER the clang of the guard-room door and the clack of the bolt had given evidence that Squire Nile had departed, Douglass sat on his cot, searching for some ray of hope or encouragement that would light up the maze of his dark ponderings.

He found a little comfort in the reflection that he had not allowed himself to regret in thought or by word, "the mistake of coming back to Canton" during his talk with the squire about this new trouble. Douglass manfully accepted the situation as one of his own making. The lawyer had kept off the topic, also. The young man liked that in him. It was no sort of time for any cry-baby notions!

A jail was a lonely place for one who could not sleep. To be deprived of all youth's volitions in the matter of activity! He envied the men who were snoring; they were forgetting their problems for a few hours!

He did not pay much attention to anything outside his own ponderings for some time; then he found himself wondering whether certain partly audible sounds were snores or the voices of men in subdued conversation. He could not distinguish any words.

He listened for a long time. There was a hiss, like a breathing between teeth. There was a deep, low growl. A man asleep might make a noise like that. But to Douglass the combination of sounds suggested those voices he had heard in the night under the Norway pines.

However, he arrived at no definite conclusion, and gave over thinking on the matter, sourly informing himself that he probably had stutterers and growlers on the brain.

In the morning there was more or less gabble of voices in the cells adjoining his and in the cells of the tier below. He was more certain of his ears; prisoners were talking less guardedly than in the night when conversation between cells was interdicted. He believed that he did hear the voices of those men who had plotted against the treasure of Swinton Tingley. Whoever they might be they were lodged in the cells below him.

Later in the forenoon there was a bit of a stir in the lower corridor. He could not see what was going on because of the rail and the platform in front of the cell.

Doors were unlocked; he heard clicks and knew that handcuffs were being affixed because a voice had directed authoritatively: "Stick out your paws!"

Then a deep voice said: "Good-by, trusty!"

"S-s-s-s-so long!" constituted another farewell.

The response that he heard was evidently delivered by the trusty. The speaker called them "Boys!" and expressed the friendly hope that they wouldn't get too raw a deal down "at the big keg!"

After a time Douglass ventured to accost a trusty who was detailed to the upper tier. "Taking somebody away?"

"Only a pair of tough birds who got theirs in court here yesterday. A State prison whack for 'em."

"What's their names?" Douglass put his face close to the bars and queried anxiously.

"I don't know," returned the trusty, with bland indifference.

"What did they do?"

"I never asked. I've got too many troubles of my own," declared the prisoner, dipping his mop.

But he had detected something more than ordinary curiosity in Douglass's manner. He inspected the face at the barred door. "Oh, you're the Canton big-job chap! I don't bother with the thirty-day drunks who ask questions, but I reckon I'll have to oblige a big jobber."

Though Douglass was not flattered by that sort of consideration, he was glad that it promised him some crumbs of information.

The man leaned over the rail and attracted the attention of the trusty who was mopping below. "Who were the guys just railroaded?"

"Blew a safe in Bridgton. Got caught at the job. Quick work in court yesterday. Down they go!"

"What's their names?"

"I've forgot. Called each other 'Speck' and 'Tudge.' Have been over the road before."

A turnkey barked at the trusties through the guard-door wicket, and they went on slapping their mops more industriously.

Douglass had that piece of information, vague and inconclusive as it was, to impart to Squire Nile at their next interview.

"The voices sounded like those I have told you about. But I can't swear that they are the men, of course. The conditions for hearing were not the same here in the jail as they were under the pines that night."

"It's too bad the thumb-screw system has been abolished," snarled the squire. "The plan had its defects, but a few good twists would be perfectly justified in a case like this. Knaves of their stripe won't add to their troubles by any consideration for your scrape. We must stick to our legal last, bub, and keep pegging away. We can't consider such men as available witnesses; we merely know where two renegades are, and where they'll be for some

time to come, but that isn't much comfort!"

Other comfort for the prisoner in his straits was as meager as the unpromising hope suggested by his partial identification of the voices.

At the time of Douglass's arrest, the grand jury for the shrievalty of Sharon was in session.

On that account the authorities had moved promptly in ordering his detention.

And as promptly the young man was indicted.

He was held for trial, without bail.

The victim had discounted that certain prospect of indictment with all the philosophy he could muster—and the old lawyer added a little helpful philosophy of his own.

But Douglass found that his consciousness of innocence was not the comforting moral stay that he had expected it would prove to be; innocence caused him to feel that this was more of that blind persecution.

He was getting sidelights on circumstantial evidence, receiving decidedly more poignant impressions than he had secured from his placid study of Blackstone.

Squire Nile, when he made his visits, was obliged to deal with extremes of anger and despair in his client; but the old man, who was allowed the freedom of the open world, found in his heart plenty of excuse for this young man, disgracefully caged just when his life hopes had begun to bud.

Occasionally, during the wait between indictment and trial, the lawyer brought Nina Bingham.

Squire Nile, incorruptible veteran of the courts, had the full confidence of the jailer of Sharon County, and arranged for interviews so that Douglass and the girl could talk together without being embarrassed by official eavesdroppers.

Her spirit, her courage, her devotion—a devotion that she frankly unveiled and fervently expressed in this exigency—did more than anything else to fortify Douglass. He listened with respect to the squire's plans for defense, his keen legal expositions of the situation; but Nina Bingham's honest, earnest, sympathetic confidence, no matter how illogical her reasonings were from a legal standpoint, engaged his thoughts, when he was alone, almost to the exclusion of what the lawyer had said.

The very naïveté of the girl in confessing that she did not have the least idea how he would be able to escape from his troubles, coupled with her implicit belief that all would be set right somehow, was more refreshing than all the arguments that the lawyer based on legal grounds. And the girl was so obedient to every suggestion that Douglass made! The old squire was often provoking in his objections.

For instance, there was Douglass's continued insistence that she must say nothing about her temporary possession of the revolver. He had become wilfully obstinate on that point, though he realized his own folly, from a legal standpoint. She did not understand, she reiterated, but she was willing to obey him in anything he might command.

The young man confessed to himself that his mental workings on the matter of the revolver were still somewhat mixed, but he had made up his mind to fight it through on that line, and did not attempt to untangle his chivalrous protection of her from his own obstinacy in the thing.

If he saw added danger for himself and an extra burden on the shoulders of his counsel, he dismissed the matter with the excuse that Nina might come under suspicion—even be charged with perjury—if she changed or added to the testimony she had given under oath at the inquest conducted by Medical Examiner Crockett.

He feared for her, the malice that was attacking him.

On that revolver, as a case foundation, Detective Odlin had set the superstructure of his fabric of circumstantial evidence!

Searching through the purlieus of the Tingley premises, in widening circles around the old house on the hill, the toe of his boot had kicked the weapon up out of the duff under the Norway pines.

Merchant Dustin had previously been communicative in regard to the sale of a "thirty-two" to Barron Douglass, who had so bloodthirstily boasted that he might go out and kill off a few persons! Dustin's

book of registry proved the identity of that revolver; Dustin's memory of the conversation disregarded the element of jest.

Mr. Odlin, who called himself "an operator," had a book of his own—his journal in which he set down each night a scrupulously complete record of his conversations and activities during the day.

At the trial of Barron Douglass, charged with the robbery and murder of Swinton Tingley, Mr. Odlin was on the witness stand for the most of two days, reading from that book. He had made oath to the verbatim correctness of his writings.

What Blackstone expounded in the way of legal theory regarding the force of linked circumstantial evidence, Mr. Odlin set forth in practical details. He made no comments—shaded nothing by even a breath of partiality or inference. As to what deductions might be drawn, he was plainly as indifferent as a phonograph machine, playing a record. He showed what may be done by painstaking industry in patching together scraps of rural gossip on a framework of actual happenings. He did a good job.

While Mr. Odlin read monotonously, the State's attorney-general had nothing to do except nurse the creases of his smart summer suit and distribute full-eyed stares of satisfaction among the jurymen; it was as if he were taking them into his confidence; every glance was like a "There you are, men! Nothing else to it, eh?"

In fact, while the massed listeners focused their attention, crowded on the courtroom benches, they nudged each other with unobtrusive elbow-thrusts, and now and then a grunt indorsed the triumph that shone in the eyes of the attorney-general who had a two-years' record of a conviction in every murder case.

Mr. Odlin did not go back to the alleged delinquencies of the accused boy's boyhood days. Farmer Breck Blaisdell attended to that matter in the early stages of the trial and sourly related how he had tried to beat a sense of honesty into an industrial-school foundling with a larrup strap.

Mr. Blaisdell pleaded loss of memory on account of lapse of years, and was not very clear as to what were the misdemeanors that called for correction. He was questioned sharply on this point by Squire Nile, in cross-examination. But though he could not cite specific instances of turpitude, he was emphatically certain that "the critter needed what he got, or else he, Mr. Blaisdell, would never have raised hand, that being his nature. Mild and gentle—always gentle and mild."

When the squire brought forth court records to show that Farmer Blaisdell had been six times before the court on S. P. C. A. charges of vicious cruelty to animals, Mr. Blaisdell sullenly stated that he had acted in self-defense.

But though Douglass's foster father was not convincing in his intimations that his protégé had been born a murderer, the detective's matter-of-fact exposition of what had happened in Canton since the sergeant's return from the war did prevail powerfully in indicating that some sort of experience overseas had gone far to develop a murderer's inclinations.

There was the well-attested attack on Swinton Tingley, witnessed by all who happened to be on Main Street in Canton, backed by the records of Trial Justice Bragg's court. There were the threats that the young man had made. There was full recital of what the townspeople had to say about the attentions to Nina Bingham, resented so furiously by the miserly uncle. There was the story of the man who had been passing the Tingley house and had heard the words between Tingley and Douglass and had seen the latter thrust the old man forcibly back into the house.

This, as well as other evidence, was corroborated at first hand by witnesses.

There was Douglass's strange and surly state of mind at Mrs. Bristow's supper table, his sneaking way of leaving the village that evening, his presence at the scene of the tragedy before the neighbors arrived—and all was triumphantly capped by the testified fact that Swinton Tingley's death had been caused by a bullet from a thirty-two-caliber weapon. Doctor Crockett affirmed so. Doctor Sawtell gave in testimony to the same effect.

There, on the table in front of the attorney-general, lay a revolver, purchased by the prisoner, tagged "Exhibit A."

But even when circumstantial evidence had been welded into cumulative strength, human nature in those listeners sought for compelling motive to put the finishing apex on what had been built.

Doctor Sawtell was called to the stand.

The separation of his testimony as a physician from this later testimony as a neighbor, was a dramatic touch engineered by the State's prosecutor.

Doctor Sawtell's demeanor indicated that he was an unwilling witness in this phase of the case. His usually cherubic face was clouded with gloom; his jaws sagged with grief; his statements came draggingly after questions had been banged at him by the attorney-general.

But he told a story to which that human nature in the listeners responded understandingly.

He told the story of the taunting temptation of Barron Douglass.

He dwelt gustfully on the spectacle of that heaped-up treasure.

He admitted that the young man had threatened to grab.

Then the attorney-general rose, and while he waited for the buzz in the court-room to subside, he lifted the lapel of his coat and sniffed at his boutonnière. "The State rests its case," said he.

Squire Nile made a pathetic figure in that trial instead of a commanding one. The desperation with which he fought was evident. The eloquence of the appeal to judge and jury in the squire's opening for the plaintiff stirred the hearts of all who sat in rapt silence and heard him.

The story told by Barron Douglass about those voices in the night and those shadows flitting under the pines, and the wistfully earnest statements of Nina Bingham were heard either with doubt or with pitying respect, according to individual prejudice. But their struggle was against that bitter logic that human nature secretly admits as conclusive.

In the case of those two principal witnesses the State's prosecutor made a tricky play in tactics. Displaying indifference when Douglass had finished, he told the prisoner to step down. There was disdainful suggestion that the case was so thoroughly sewed up that any cross-examination would be superfluous.

After Nina had finished her story, the attorney-general put much compassion into his tone and expression and said that he had no questions!

Nor, in his argument, did he assail the prisoner! He followed adroitly the line of Canton's gossip and reasoning—it was a pity that the horrors and cruelties of war had changed the nature of a man, and that the scenes of looting in the Old World had made an unfortunate youth too susceptible to temptation in the New.

So, the case went to the jury.

It was a bit past the hour when the folks of the shire town were accustomed to sit down to supper, but the jurymen, through their foreman, politely declined the offer of the judge to allow them to eat before retiring to begin their deliberations. In their refusal to eat there was tacit intimation that they did not expect to be long at their work.

Squire Nile, knowing well the mental processes of any band of "twelve good men and true," cuddled no illusions. He slowly reached forth his hand and laced his fingers with those of Douglass, at his side.

The gloom of the evening was deepening in the corners of the old court-room.

The judge, his black robe flipping on his heels, retired to his chamber.

The crowd in the court-room thinned; the listeners had been close-packed on the benches for many hours; some went home with the satisfied air of being sure of the result; others went outdoors to relax and gossip; they knew they had time a plenty; the jury might be expected to avoid an uncomplimentary precipitateness in rendering its verdict.

Douglass did not turn his face to the old lawyer.

Nina Bingham had remained in her place in the row of chairs reserved for witnesses. With tear-dimmed eyes the lovers were attempting to telegraph consolation, and were failing.

A bailiff with creaking shoes was going about, lighting the bracket lamps.

Outside, heard in the silence through the open window, there was the mumble of

many voices, and somebody, in tones raised higher than the others, delivered this dictum: "He done it, of course. But the defense wasn't managed right. If he had owned up as how he done it and had pleaded self-defense, if I was on the jury I'd vote to acquit him, seeing that it was Swint Tingley he killed!"

The squire pulled the clutch of his fingers more tightly.

"It isn't over, my boy! I have noted eleven exceptions. I shall file 'em as soon as that jury reports."

"No, you shall not file them, Squire Nile!" Douglass stroked the tears from his eyes and exhibited sudden firmness. "I have had plenty of time to think it all over. I have made up my mind."

"Good grief! Are you going to give up like this?"

"No, sir! I am just beginning my fight!"

"But when you turn down the only course that's left to you in law, you don't show much signs of fighting," objected the squire, considerably nettled by his client's rebellion. "That widow shows more sense than you do, though she isn't supposed to know much more 'n a goose. In your case, you're innocent and you're quitting. In her case, they've found arsenic, and she isn't a mite discouraged."

"Do I sound as if I am discouraged?"

"But we must go on in law, and—"

"I can talk straight man talk to you, Squire Nile, and you know me too well to think that I'm ungrateful. But if I sit back now and wait for more law to help me I'll be letting false hopes cause me to lose my grip on what I intend to do."

"Love o' goodness, what can you do? What say!" demanded the lawyer.

"I don't know—not right now," confessed the client, adding to his mentor's mystification. "But I have been over in a place where I have seen injustice throttled. I'm an innocent man. I believe that these are times; after all the sacrifices have been made, when there's such a thing as a man being saved by the right. I'm going to depend on that principle."

"If you had been having any chance to get out in the sun lately, I should take it that your brain has been affected by the heat," retorted the old lawyer. "Of course there's such a thing as the right, but it roosts blamed high, and you need the law to bring it down!"

The squire loosed his grip on Douglass's fingers.

The client had resumed his rapt contemplation of Nina Bingham's countenance, and gave no sign that he had heard his lawyer's tart remark.

"You look my way for a minute, son, even if it hurts your eyes. What's your real reason for dumping me off your case at this point, outside the poppycock one you have just given me?"

"I do feel, just as I have explained to you. I feel—"

"You look straight at me for a minute instead of at that girl, there, and you'll feel your feet tramping on the solid ground instead of treading on cloud puffs. I'm a lawyer—you hope to be one. I want law from you instead of dreams. What say! Cases, now!"

This cynical demand from the legal materialist made Douglass understand how futile would be an attempt to explain this new exaltation that was giving him courage and hope. This mental state was not clear even to Douglass, himself. He abandoned any further efforts along that line.

"What say! Out with it. You can't fool me!" insisted his counsel.

The young man did have two practical reasons for his objections. But he dreaded to mention them. He had hoped to conceal one, especially, by his sophomoric declaration in regard to the puissance of the right. But those keen gray eyes, under the lids puckered like little tents, were not to be gainsaid.

"You won't understand me right, Squire Nile, I'm afraid." It was faltering apology for what he was about to say.

"I'll understand the truth—if it's without frills. Go ahead."

"I know how much it costs to fight a case through to the high court! What you have done already—"

"Twitting me on my poverty, hey? I knew you'd be getting around to it, sooner or later. That's what I get for telling you

the entire truth about my money, confound you!"

"But I have already been a—"

"Been! If I should tell you what you are at this moment, sitting there putting me into the miser class along with Swint Tingley, both of your ears would curl up like frizzled bacon! You've said enough! Shut up! After this—well, young man, I've got you placed where you belong! Your tongue has placed you there! Good-by!"

Violent as this denunciation had been, it was spoken in an undertone. Squire Nile leaped up and walked out of the court-room, the lamplight glinting on the shoulders of his old coat.

Douglass had been bitterly afraid that he would touch Cassius Nile's pride; but he had been reflecting on his position as a drag on the resources of a man who had so little he could call his own. More of that wilful, worldly obstinacy in misunderstanding a poor devil who was trying so hard to do his best!

The squire's manner of departure gave Douglass full assurance that the prisoner's case had been abandoned, so far as the law was concerned. It had been at his request, to be sure, but he was not consoled.

In his abject misery, his eyes sought once more those of the waiting girl. In the hour of silence that followed, in their Gethsemane of anguish of soul, they welded in that court-room the bonds of a love that was truer, deeper and more lasting than the passion that is born of sentimentality under the stars and nourished by the scent of blossoms and ardent words.

So silent was the court-room that at last they heard—muffled, distant, ominous—the knocking of a human fist on resounding wood. Douglass knew! The jury was calling for the sheriff and his key.

The word went about. The crowds flocked back to the settees. The judge, twitching at the sleeves of the hastily donned robe, took his place on the bench. Preceded and followed by bailiffs with wooden staves, the jurymen tramped in and took their places on the panel. The clerk of the court made formal demand in the set, legal terms.

The foreman pulled his uneasy fingers from inside his collar.

"Guilty!"

The throng revealed its emotion by suspiration, rustle and murmur. All had expected that verdict. But the foreman offered something that few did expect. He meekly asked permission to speak, and the judge told him to proceed.

"In behalf of myself and the other jurymen, I would like to say we think there were extenuating circumstances and we hope, seeing that the man has been a soldier, those circumstances will be considered by the court."

The judge thanked the jury for its faithful service and excused it.

"The prisoner is remanded for sentence," he directed.

Up the aisle from the rear of the room came Squire Nile, his coat-tails wing-and-wing behind him.

"'May it please your honor, I wish to file exceptions in this case."

The judge showed no surprise; in fact, he had been looking around the court-room as if he had missed somebody or was waiting for something. "The court will be pleased to give its attention to you tomorrow morning, Brother Nile!"

The squire was gathering up his papers when Douglass responded to the finger-tap of the court deputy, calling the prisoner to follow.

"You young Hessian!" growled the old lawyer in his client's ear. "I'll show you that you can't insult me with impunity!" But the smile that accompanied those words was a benediction full of pity and love.

Behind a smile like that, in that hour of stress, there was something that was not of law, Douglass knew. He was emboldened to speak out on that other reason he had been withholding from his counsel. "I want a word with you, sir! Will you arrange with the deputy?"

The obliging officer obeyed the old lawyer's gesture and walked away to a discreet distance.

"Sir, this is man to man, without bothering with any law technicalities. I want to go to State prison—and I want to go at once."

"They seem to be attending to that matter in your case," growled the squire.

"You don't understand me, sir. If this case is appealed I'll be obliged to stay in the county jail, here, for months, waiting for the decision of the full bench. Then it's another trial!"

He answered the protest in the lawyer's eyes. "No, no! This isn't further talk about expense! But I have spent a good many hours thinking over the matter of those voices and those two men.

Something tells me I'm on the right track. I'll go crazy if I'm kept waiting around this jail, trying to get justice through the law. I want to play the game on my own hook. I believe with all my heart that my witnesses are in the State prison—the witnesses I must have. I'm going after them." He drove his fist down on the lawyer's papers.

Squire Nile sat back in his chair and stared at his client for a full minute.

"Don't talk law and its procedure now," pleaded the young man.

"No danger of it! It doesn't belong in this conversation. This comes straight, does it, this last proposition of yours? You mean it—no mental reservation about that expense matter?"

"On my honor as a soldier, sir!"

The lawyer stared up into the maze of the chandelier; he lowered his eyes and saw Nina Bingham waiting alone in a far corner of the court-room. He beckoned to her, and she came hastily.

"The boy wants to make a two-fisted fight of it—in State prison! Does it frighten you to think of his being in State prison, Sis?" blurted Squire Nile.

"Wherever he is my heart and my soul are with him."

"With those for cellmates I reckon there'll be no trouble with his grit—and it looks like there's plenty of grit on both sides!"

He gave her a stare of admiration. There were no more tears in her eyes. She put out both hands to Barron, and he took them.

"We have talked it over—what he would do if injustice went as far as this, Squire Nile," she declared. "We know that you can attend to the law part of it!"

"I reckon I can do something a blamed sight more sensible with new evidence than with those eleven exceptions," confessed the old man.

"I'm going after new evidence," promised Douglass, the thrill of determination in his low tones. "I'm going where it can be found—inside the walls of State prison."

"I guess," drawled the squire, after a pause for further reflection, "that we'll let the attorney-general move for sentence in the morning. It would be too bad to file exceptions and spoil his record—also his relish for his fresh buttonhole bouquet." He paused again. "Now, bub, if you want to blame me for any part in your coming back to Canton—"

But, disregarding the attentive deputy, Douglass put his arms around Nina, drew her into a close embrace, and kissed her.

"Reckon I'm answered," muttered Squire Nile.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT A CONVICT MAY THINK.

TO be imprisoned for life in the State prison—that was the sentence. The jury's meek plea had had some influence in keeping the noose from the convicted man's neck. When he and the squire were back in the jail cell, the prisoner stood straighter and smiled!

"What's the matter with you?" choked the lawyer; the strain had told on him.

"You know what the zero hour stood for, over across!"

"Yes."

"I reckon it's here, right now, in my case. I have been doing a lot of worrying and praying and suffering and swearing in this—this trench." An impatient wave of his hand indicated his cell. "Now I'm done along that line. I'm going over the top. I'm glad of the chance!"

The old man despondently surveyed this queer optimism. "You'll find the trench in State prison a good deal deeper, I'm afraid!"

"Well, I'm going to consider it the

trench where the enemy is planted—and there'll be plenty of fighting. God bless you, you've done your best for me. Now I've got to go in on my own hook. That's knowledge that ought to put the strength into any man," declared Sergeant Douglass. "So, let's shake on it!" He grabbed the squire's hand. "Good-by!"

"This hand-wag doesn't mean good-by—not yet," asserted the lawyer. "I propose to go along and walk into the warden's office with you. I want him to know that you've got one friend."

And there was another friend who could not be dissuaded from joining the melancholy expedition; Nina Bingham rode beside her lover in the train.

There had been sarcastic comments by the station crowd at the shire town—comments that dealt harshly with the nature of a girl "who would lallygag around the feller who had murdered her uncle." According to the opinions expressed by some persistently malicious commentators, Nina's devotion to Barron Douglass indicated a guilty plot between the two in the taking-off of the man who had stood between them.

But the comments, though meant to be overheard, brought not even a trace of color to Nina's cheeks. She seemed to be animated by the same self-poise and courage that the new spirit of Barron Douglass displayed.

"I don't understand it," mused the squire, studying their faces from his seat across the car aisle. "All I can say is, God bless you for brave young critters, the both of you!"

During all the journey the lovers chatted with a cheerfulness that kept the eyebrows of the State prison officer arched in continual astonishment. His experience had been with prisoners who sulked and maidens who lamented.

Squire Nile, after the experiences of that disastrous trial, had no heart to boast of prowess or ability or influence. When he entered the warden's office at the State prison with his convoy he waited with humility for such attention as the official might be inclined to give him. Distrusting himself and, possibly, not sure of the young man's attitude toward the proffer of any more assistance, the squire had refrained from revealing that he and Warden Cates had once been seatmates and close pals during a session of the legislature.

Warden Cates promptly made known that fact, and his friendship, as well.

He was a fat, smiling, jolly man, with expansive paunch and double chin, and he patted his new prisoner's shoulder and told him to cheer up. Then he responded to a suggestive wag of the lawyer's head and retired with him to an inner office.

The guard, impressed, offered chairs to the prisoner and the girl, and stepped aside and turned his back.

"I was afraid it was all going to be so cold and solemn and cruel here," confided Nina, a catch in her voice. The sunshine flooded through the big windows of the office, and the window plants were blooming. "But it's real pleasant, isn't it, Barron?"

"And it's going to come out all right in a little while, dear," he assured her. "And I'm going to be comfortable here. You know they keep these State prisons up better than they do county jails."

She touched his hand.

"The warden seems kind."

"Oh, you can see that! You mustn't worry about me."

There was pathos in the little dialogue and in the smiles they mustered for the sake of each other, like two children, hiding bitter tears and making light of dangers.

"How often are you allowed to write a letter, Barron?"

He referred that question to the guard.

"Once a week—two sheets. Used to be one sheet, once in two weeks. But Warden Cates believes in being human. He's a fine man!"

"Do you hear that?" cried the girl. "Why, think what it's going to mean—his being such a good friend of Squire Nile! And a letter once a week to me. Write the first one to-morrow, Barron. I'll go to the general delivery for it."

"General delivery?"

"Yes, here—here in this city."

"But you're going back to—"

"I'm going to stay here—near you. I haven't said anything about it before be-

cause I didn't want to argue with you. But I'm going to stay. I'm going to find work. I'll give you my address as soon as I get a boarding place."

Whether his expression signified amazement or protest she did not learn. At that moment the warden and the lawyer returned in good humor with each other.

Warden Cates did not put aside that good humor after Douglass's loyal adherents had gone away. That consistency was encouraging. He chatted with the young man while a clerk made the requisite records. He diplomatically avoided any reference to the case or to what his conversation with the lawyer tended. But he did say that he was trying his best to humanize the institution and to put prisoners to tasks that best fitted them.

"And we'll try to do something sensible in your case," he said. "I'm being criticized by some of the ramrods for being a little easy, so they say. But I'm depending on a certain amount of natural honor in any man who is used right. You haven't it in your disposition to abuse privileges, have you?"

"No, sir."

"I like the way you say that. It doesn't do to play favorites in a place of this sort, but we do consider what is due to a man who shows that he is trying to co-operate; that's his reward for merit. I was glad to talk with Cassius Nile."

It was not promise of anything special, but Douglass was much heartened. When he was in his cell even the stripes of the stiffly-laundered prison suit were not so hideously suggestive of shame as he had feared they would be. He was depending, in his new mood on the right. He was innocent. The worry of waiting was no longer oppressing him. If he were to depend on the right, then he must be right, himself. Out of this spirit came a mental parole, meeting the implied promise of the warden half way.

The prison chaplain, making prompt acquaintance with his new charge, expressed mild surprise in mentioning to the prison physician the cheerful equanimity of the prisoner; the chaplain had read the newspaper accounts of the case.

"I am always glad," he continued, "when I discover that punishment is borne with cheerful patience. It shows that repentance is—"

"You're new here," broke in the grizzled doctor. "I have had a long time in this prison to study the mental processes of those who have any mental processes worth studying. I don't bother about the most of these stupid steers. They chew their cuds in here, at their stanchions, and stay placid enough. But this cheerful, repentant chap you're bragging about—he's sure to make trouble for us. Watch out for him!"

The chaplain protested mildly.

"Oh, I know what I'm talking about, parson! This fellow has brains—having ambition to be a lawyer. May be reckoned as being above the average intelligence we meet in convicts. First phase on landing in here, exaltation. Possibly may be innocent. Furthermore, with thoughts boosted by the magnetism of having been the center of public interest, feels that he is of enough importance to secure justice if innocent, or condonation if he's guilty.

"Second phase, a little later, is realization that the outside world is usually too busy to bother with a convict's troubles. The convict has plenty of time for thinking on that subject, and those in-growing thoughts put a snake-twist in his moral nature, providing he has been gifted with a nature of that sort.

"Third phase, ugly resentment against everybody and everything. Then the man becomes automatically a bad prisoner."

The chaplain was not convinced, and said something to that effect.

"But I tell you," insisted the physician, "that the consciously innocent man becomes more dangerously desperate in his determination to get out."

"On the other hand," objected Chaplain Allan, "I have had opportunity to learn that two of the most consciously guilty men in this prison are more dead-set on escaping than ony other prisoners."

"Who are the men?"

"Stephen Foster and Samuel Fogg."

The doctor wagged his head and blinked his mystification.

"The yeggmen—the Bridgton safe-blowing robbers."

"Oh, 'Speck' and 'Tudge,'" blurted the doctor, accustomed to the more intimate kind of nomenclature when he discussed convicts. "Both of them were placid enough when they served terms here before you came to bless and console the penitent, Chaplain. What seems to be their special itch this time?"

"I am much in the dark, though I have encouraged them to confess their misdeeds to me," said the chaplain, admitting his failure so ingenuously that he stirred a grin on the physician's countenance. "But Samuel Fogg—"

"That's 'Tudge.' He fizzes so violently over the S in Sam that he gave up calling himself by his right name in his early youth."

"He has made some shockingly profane observations regarding some unnamed person who has injured him, so he says."

"Oh, well! Don't pay much attention to 'em," advised the doctor, transferring his interest to the vials in his medicine case. "Most of 'em in here are nursing a grouch in default of something better to take up their minds."

"But it's going to be distinctly dreadful for this unknown person when those men get out," demurred the chaplain. "I'm really terrified by their threats. They talk of nothing less than murder—and murder by lingering torture!"

There was so much apprehensiveness in the good man's tone and manner that the prison doctor, grown gray in the service, laughed. "In pursuit of your general benevolence, parson, it should be your great aim to get at the name of this imperilled unknown and warn him to go up in a balloon."

"I have done my honest best," declared the chaplain, too earnest in the matter to perceive banter in the doctor's advice. "But when they are calm they shrewdly hide their secret; when they are wrought up in passion, as they so often are, they become so incoherent that I cannot understand."

"Then they are playing it safe both ways, chaplain!" The physician snapped the catches of his case and rose. The conversation had been going on in the prison library, where the doctor had a desk and a reserve medicine cabinet.

"Just a moment, Dr. Shepard! You have had much experience. I feel the need of a little advice. The warden has told me that I may select an assistant for the library among the convicts. What do you think of the man, Douglass, for the position?"

"Did Warden Cates recommend him?"

"No! Oh, no! I can't say that he did. Not in so many words. He spoke of a man of some intelligence. I believe the name of Douglass did come up. I got the impression, somehow, that the warden was somewhat interested in this convict."

The doctor made quick survey of the room to make sure that there were no official eavesdroppers. "You must remember that your dealing with a lifer, chaplain. You must reckon with that mental state I was talking about a little while ago. Between you and me—and let it go no farther—I'm afraid the old man is easing up on the lifers a bit too much. This new-fangled prison régime they're preaching all over the country sounds good, but human nature must be considered. Two weeks ago the old man, as you know, took eleven lifers for a walk in the park, simply on their words of honor!"

"But the expression on their faces when they came back with him—and shook hands with him—it was glorious!"

"Uhuh," grunted the veteran. "But the old man is new here, the same as you. He'll wake up to the fact when something happens, that Warden Josselyn wasn't far wrong in his system. "'This isn't a high school—this is a State's prison,' old Josselyn used to say. 'And I'll make 'em understand condemned well what it is.'

"And now we're having baseball games and a brass-band and lectures and movies and evening song-fests, chaplain, and all the other tommydingle that can be thought of! I know that a good deal of it is your own idea, but this is a punitive institution, and you're proceeding along wrong lines. You'd better let Convict Douglass stay in the shops where the chaps with the maga-

zine rifles can keep a sharp eye on him. They won't fool for a minute with those consecutive mental phases I have mentioned."

He marched out before the chaplain could retort.

The reverent gentleman, left alone, indicated that he had a streak of fractious human nature of his own hidden behind the mask of the professional demeanor that he wore in public. He banged his fist on his desk and muttered something about the folly of trying to cure everything in this world with pills and bullets.

By the manner in which he went tramping out of the library it was evident that the indecision which he had asked the doctor to remedy with advice no longer troubled him.

He found Convict Douglass in the broom-shop. The young man was intent on his work and was plainly trying to do his best. But he was making poor shift at shaping a stable broom, and his hand was bleeding from a stab by an unruly wire.

The chaplain had a word for the superintendent and another for the grim guard who sat on a stool with a forty-four-seventy rifle in the hook of his arm.

"I have the privilege of choosing a library assistant, Douglass," stated Chaplain Allan, after he had touched the convict's arm to attract his attention. "I have decided to take you. You may come with me now."

"Yes, sir!" It was humbly grateful acknowledgment.

When the young man followed behind his deliverer he bent his head to hide the tears.

He was wondering if that mystic, hoped for influence which his soul had named "The Right," and for which he had been so patiently waiting, had begun to show a first glimpse of mercy!

A bit of superstition was governing his procedure in the State prison. He had resolved not to force any situation. He had his eyes and ears out constantly, but he was not making any overt attempt to identify the sizzling stutterer and the growling associate.

The library ought to offer better opportunities; the chaplain, unless Douglass's memory was in error in regard to prison régime, sometimes used his assistant in the distribution of books to the cells.

He determined to be patient.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE TRIMMED PROPER" CLUB.

IN Douglass's new environment, o' daytimes, there was little else than his prison garb to suggest his convict state.

There were no hateful bolts and bars evident.

A detached building housed the prison's modest collection of books. If one did not look out at the surrounding, gray, stone walls where warders tramped with rifles at shoulder, the edge of the sense of confinement was dulled. The machinery in the shops hummed with comforting sound of honest industry, and in the forge house hammers clanked musically.

On certain days, in the early stage of his imprisonment, Nina had been allowed brief hours with the young man in the guard-room. But the bars and the precautions and the solemn guards had ominously dominated her feelings, in spite of her efforts to be cheery and hopeful.

When Chaplain Allan's clemency allowed her to sit in the library for a time each Wednesday afternoon she chatted with the ingenuous gaiety of a child. Douglass was not deceived. He understood the grief she was trying to hide from him There was a pathos in her bravery for his sake that brought tears to his eyes. However, there was a ray of comfort in this new situation, and they turned their backs on the black truth as best they were able. She had become a milliner's helper, and tried to amuse him by her tales about freakish customers.

Douglass was not especially inclined to perceive humor in anything in those drear times. One day, however, Nina afforded him a bit of comedy relief that took his mind off his troubles.

On their way from the smithy to the carriage shop two convicts passed, stag-

gering along with a lug-stretcher on which were piled metal parts. They were distinctly unhandsome individuals. The weight of their burden was causing them to twist up their faces with horrible grimaces. Those faces were smooched with smut from chins to the slewed, striped caps.

"What dreadful-looking creatures!" gasped the girl, viewing them from the window.

"Their looks do not belie them—they are very wicked men," was the chaplain's endorsement. "I have talked much with them, but they do not see the error of their ways."

The influence of the unhampered library surroundings had been having their effect on Nina. For her own peace of mind she had been sticking to her own conception of her lover's prison life as he lived it daytimes. "Barron, it makes me nervous to think of your living in a place where there are such wicked men. Do be careful to lock your door every night before you go to sleep," she entreated earnestly.

"There's a man who attends to all that very carefully, sweetheart," the prisoner assured her; he put his palm to his mouth to control his twitching lips.

"Oh, yes!" corroborated Chaplain Allan, bestowing his smile on the blank ceiling instead of on her troubled face. "Those two wicked men are very, very carefully locked up every night."

"Who are they? What did they do, sir?"

"It is against the prison rules to identify convicts to visitors, my dear young lady." Then he broke upon her confused apology. "But in your case, no harm can come from my telling you that they robbed a safe and were caught in the act. They are bad men, even now in prison breathing fire and fury through their nostrils, declaring a vengeance they will take when they get back into the world."

A little later Douglass stood in the library door with Nina; her time with him was up; the chaplain had gone to the closet for his hat and overcoat, preparing to accompany the girl across the prison yard.

Again the uncomely men passed the building, on their return to the smithy.

This time Nina stared full into their faces; there was no interposition of dingy glass.

She clutched her lover's arm after they had passed. "Barron, I have seen those men before!"

"Where?"

"They came to our back door one day to beg for food. Uncle Swinton drove them away. They were ragged and dirty like tramps! I could never forget those faces. It was only a little while before you came back from the war."

"Do you suppose—" but he checked his query. The chaplain had joined them.

This was assuredly not a matter to be canvassed at that moment before a third party. Douglass pressed her hand and she went away.

He wondered whether she had really recognized those men or had simply confounded those ugly faces with others of the same type. It would be easy for a frightened girl to err. In that milling of humankind in which he had found himself when he joined the army, he had learned many facts regarding the various castes of the crooks. He understood pretty well the queer whimsies of pride among malefactors. Men who blew safes were not the kind who abased themselves at back doors, "mooching" for grub.

On the other hand, it was easy to credit the notion that they had disguised themselves as vags and had come to the Tingley door, hoping to spy out the lay of the land.

Four men had engaged in that ferocious set-to in the night under the Norway pines. He became more and more certain that here, penned in prison with him, were two who were actually guilty or possessed guilty knowledge!

How was he to seize upon this opportunity, if it were such?

How could he identify these men, whom Nina had claimed to recognize, with the vague shadows that flitted before him in the night?

Shadows! In his desperate helplessness he was ready to grab even at shadows.

How could he extract their knowledge for his own salvation?

He went on with the tasks to which

Chaplain Allan had set him. This was the preparation of written lessons suited to the limited intellects of those whom the chaplain instructed each evening through the gratings of their cells. It was work that allowed Douglass time to ponder on his own problems.

The night came earlier each day. But the opportunity which he sought did not come.

The bell clanged in the tower and the convicts came forth from the shops, shuffling in close file, their hands upon each other's shoulders.

Douglass joined the line in his allotted place, took his bucket from the rail before he entered the door, received his food quota that had been dabbed into the compartments of the tin receptacle, and went on to his cell.

He and the others stood with open hands stuck forth between the bars of the cells until the count was finished; while he stood waiting he could hear the bump of rifles on the bottom of the guard-room rack, as the outside guards came in and stacked their weapons.

From the sound of the tower bell to the clang of the " All right " gong! Those few torturing minutes of the day tried his soul more than all the other hours. Driven in like cattle to stalls! Hearing the clacking of bolts that peremptorily denied all manvolition in comings and goings, in associating with humankind, in choosing how an evening should be spent!

He was glad because Nina did not know this phase and think upon it—or else had graciously concealed her troubled thoughts from him and so spared him.

He had never found any comfort in his cell. It was an antiquated structure, the whole prison, and it had been roundly denounced by commissioners who had argued before niggard legislatures. The cell was not much more than a hole in the wall. He could not pace away his restlessness.

Wondering what possibilities there were in the case of those men whom Nina had recognized, he was more uneasy. He had been giving himself up to the idea that he would eventually be helped by The Right. Was this new thing promise of help or was it delusion? He was so helpless! He ground his teeth and set his fingers into his hair and groaned and muttered. His condition would have interested Dr. Shepard as a phenomenon connected with the " secondary phase."

Out of his travail of mind, one sturdy resolve was born to Convict Douglass; he would find out if those knaves of the prison smithy were hitched up with the Canton tragedy!

In a State prison opportunity for communication between prisoners is stringently guarded against, for obvious reasons.

Douglass tried to think of some good excuse to offer for a desire to work in the smithy. But the smithy, except for the really expert iron-workers, was considered a place of punishment to which incorrigibles were relegated; it was only one remove from the dog-hole, undesirability considered. The young man had no hope of fooling Chaplain Allan to that extent! He could not afford to arouse any suspicions.

To tell the warden about these new prospects or to reveal his project would be sure to start something that would certainly put those convicts, whoever they were in the economy of the Tingley affair, wholly out of their fellow prisoner's humble reach. This was no sort of a matter to be handled by official investigation. The men would be scared into silence. Douglass knew better than to drop as much as a hint that he wanted to talk with them.

To get under their skins—to identify them—to pry some information out of them—

On the face of it, considering his position, it seemed to be as hopeless as attempting flight over the prison wall, using his palms as pinions.

Therefore, as the days went by, his impatience developed into rancor.

He saw those two heads bobbing past the library window every now and then—two heads that probably held this secret he was after. He was more than ever convinced that they did hold this secret, for Nina had scrutinized them more carefully on her succeeding visits and now affirmed her correctness of memory with much positiveness.

Some of the most bitter cases of hatred between human beings have been developed by persons, strangers to each other, without spoken word or overt act. The very unreasonableness of the hatred makes it fiercer because no sane argument may be adduced to assuage the feeling.

Those human beasts of burden, smooched by smithy smut, tramping to and fro, beheld behind the window of the library a fellow convict who had nothing heavier than a pen or a book in his grip; he scowled at them; they felt that they had better reason to scowl at him, and they did so and were able to put more malignity into their expressions, nature having given them faces especially suited to the purpose.

Furthermore, they saw a pretty girl in the company of this dilettante convict every once in a while, and were probably reminded more poignantly of their own unattractiveness.

One day they placed thumbs to noses in atrocious insult; only Nina's presence and horrified adjuration to keep away from "the brutes" prevented Douglass from leaping out on the rascals and smashing his fists on those knobby, clipped heads that hid the secret he longed for so avidly.

And, after a time, the feeling that he wanted to crack those heads and extract information as he would pick out nut-meats became an obsession.

He admitted frankly to himself that "something had got to split"!

One afternoon, he was walking across the yard, carrying an armful of magazines.

Over the top of his burden he beheld the two hateful convicts marching along the path toward him; they were lugging their empty stretcher between them.

It was not in Douglass's mind to break prison rules. He stepped to one side.

"You dough-faced dinger of a pie-eyed dude!" snarled one of the men.

"You ain't in a cosy nest cuddling a dame right now!" supplemented the other.

Then they banged the stretcher against him and knocked him flat and kicked the magazines out of his arms.

For one moment Douglass lay on his back trying to control his emotions, striving to fit action to that self-appointed code of "The Right."

Then he saw red. He leaped up and accepted their brutal challenge. State prison or no State prison, his battlefield was there!

The larger man had possessed himself of the stretcher and was swinging it with plain intent to mash the antagonist. He was easy prey because both of his hands were occupied. Douglass crouched to avoid the stretcher and felled the man with a hook to the jaw.

His partner kicked, barking an oath. The young man seized the hurtling foot and tripped the assailant.

When Douglass stepped back both men struggled up and came at him.

"S-s-s-s—smash him!"

When that battle-cry was voiced Sergeant Douglass felt a queer thrill tingle in him; he had heard that fizzling preface of a word under the Norway pines in the darkness of the night!

Once more he knocked down his first assailant.

Then he clutched the smaller convict by the throat with both hands and forced him to his knees. "You were there! You know who killed old Tingley! Damn you, tell me!"

He kept playing changes on those three sentences. He repeated them over and and over, reversing their order. His fury transfigured him.

A guard's rifle barked alarm from the prison wall. Men were shouting.

Douglass's frenzied words had conquered the two antagonists more effectually than his fists. The man whom the sergeant clutched was limp and white, staring up at the questioner and overwhelmed with panic. The young man dragged him a little way and began to kick brutally when he was near enough to reach the other man.

"Tell me! I'll have it out of you!"

But both took their punishment in affrighted silence, not attempting to rise.

On the face of things, therefore, when the blustering guards arrived, Douglass was doing all the fighting, viciously continuing to assault two unresisting men.

The warders broke his clutch and overpowered him.

"They attacked you! You were defending, yourself, Douglass, my man! That was it, eh? It must have been that way."

Chaplain Allan was anxiously apostrophizing his protégé from the side-lines.

But Douglass was in no mood to accept mediation of that sort. "No such damn thing!" was the shocking retort. "Let me at 'em!" He struggled violently with the guards.

Warden Cates, hurrying with a fat man's waddling gait, arrived on the scene and demanded to know the whys and wherefores.

Douglass ceased not from declaiming his threats. He shouted down the chaplain who was trying to offer the self-defense plea.

Dr. Shepard had followed at the heels of his superior; in devotion to certain theories that he had been maintaining, he voiced his opinion in tones that he did not guard. "It's what comes of playing favorites and letting 'em get the idea that this isn't a State prison!"

It was promptly plain that the lenient warden felt that his discretion had been challenged in public. In standing straight, in the exercise of his authority, as is usually the case, he immediately leaned backward. For reasons connected with Squire Nile, Douglass had been favored by the warden, and the warden knew it and proceeded to protect himself. "Put the convict Douglass in the doghole. Put the other two there!" he commanded sharply.

And the guards showed great alacrity in obeying, roughly handling the three culprits.

The doghole was deep in the prison's bowels, under the cell-tiers. There was an iron outer door, then half a dozen stone steps, and on the level thus reached were several narrow chambers carved from the limestone foundations on which the prison was built. Each cell had its iron door. The prisoners were locked, each in his chamber. Then the big outer door was slammed.

Douglass, rising from his knees—he had been tossed in rudely and had stumbled—found the darkness horrible after the glare of the sun outside. The black night, here, seemed to have a consistency that could be bitten into! The silence throbbed in his ears.

Then he heard something. It was the low growl of a man's voice. "'Tudge!' Put your ear down to the crack—the old way!"

It was evident that these gentlemen who shared the doghole with Convict Douglass had had experience with dogholes before.

"S-s-s-s—shoot!" was the response on the other side of Douglass's cell.

The conditions of that black night under the Norway pines were restored—were the same! A blind man recognizes a voice with even more instantaneous conviction than is displayed in a sighted person's recognition of a face.

By this time Douglass hadn't any further doubts. Unfortunate though his predicament was, he felt like blessing it. His ears convinced him—his eyes were not able to argue him into any more uncertainty. These were his men!

"Hey, you! Ring-tailed tiger!" called the man with the gruff voice. He was obliged to address several other sobriquets to Douglass before the young man realized that he was thus being summoned into conference. He put his mouth close to the crack under the door and reported ungraciously. "I'm listening!"

"You're some operator!"

"S-s-s-s—some operator," agreed the man on the other side.

"I take back what I said about your being a dude."

"S-s-s-s—same here!"

"I recognize a top-line Tom when I meet him! I'll say you're all right, and then about nine plus!"

"S-s-s-s—same here!"

It was undisguised admiration and appreciation. Douglass knew much about the methods of thought employed by men who dealt in violence and who, therefore, respected prowess that was superior. He was not especially surprised by this sudden warming to him; but he was not mollified or flattered.

"No hard feelings, bo! You capped a two to one proposition."

"S-s-s-s—sure did!"

"But that knock-out dope you handed us at the finish, when we took the count! Wrong, bo! All wrong!"

"S-s-s-s—sure is!"

"Don't I place you? The lifer in the Canton croak-job?"

"I didn't kill Swinton Tingley! You know I didn't!"

"Well, we know that we didn't! About all we can give you is the benefit of the doubt. What makes you think that we know anything about the job?"

"I was under the trees near Tingley's house and heard you talking." Douglass was getting his wrath under restraint for policy's sake.

"Uhuh!" grunted the man. There was a long silence. "Say, bo, I've been turning my thinker back. What was the last thing, nigh-about, that you heard us talk about?"

"About getting the map of somebody's mug!"

"And in ten seconds after came the big bang! Well, say! You were on the outside of the house when the play was pulled off—and you know that we were. So, we won't have any more hard feelings on that point."

"S-s-s-s—sure not!"

"As a matter-of-fact," proceeded the principal interlocutor, "we ought to be chums, for we're three of a kind. We'd better organize the 'Trimmed Proper Society.' You're entitled to be president, What's-your-name! You have been trimmed the properest. You probably will never get back what they've taken from you—being a lifer! But as to what has been taken away from us—by the—"

His oaths rose into shrill crescendo of malediction. He became incoherent.

"S-s-s-s—same here!" agreed the man on the other side, when his friend breathlessly gave over cursing. "Wait till we get out!"

"You know I didn't do it, you men!" shouted Douglass, with a fury of his own, far surpassing theirs. "You must know who did. It's up to you to tell me—to tell the courts."

"It is, is it? See here, bo! When a feller is down to his last nickel, he can't be called a tightwad when he thinks twice about how he's going to spend it. Seeing that you're a lifer, you ain't much more'n a nickel, and a plugged one at that! But we ain't going to drop you down a crack, just to hear you rattle!"

"Sus-s-s-s—certainly not!"

"Do you know what happened to us on that safe-cracking pinch?"

"No."

"Fifteen years apiece because we had a prison record! For a job that netted us about eleven dollars and an old maid's primpy-dingle front frizzes. Near's we could find out she had her safe to hide her false hair in, mostly. But we had to have money and we took a chance. Had to have money because we had just been trimmed." Again he exploded into vicious cursing.

"We want to get out," he said, after getting control of himself. "We've got business outside!"

"S-s-s-s—sure have!"

"You've got nothing on me in that line," raved Douglass. "Are you such infernal knaves that you'll see me rot in State prison when you can say the word that can straighten this thing?"

"Easy, bo! You're our plugged nickel, remember! Got to be careful of our assets right now."

"I can give you a clear bill on the Tingley business!"

"We don't need it. We're not doing fifteen years for that job. And you can't give us something special that belongs to that Tingley business. We've got to get it for ourselves. And we can't get it by staying in here and whistling. What do you thing you can do about getting us out?"

It was such blunt query about a hopeless proposition that it took away Douglass's breath. When he was able to speak he railed at the inquirer, bestowing on him names that called his general mental condition seriously into question.

"That line of talk doesn't get you anything, bo," objected the gentleman who had been assailed. "I'm trying to find out what our plugged nickel will buy?"

It was maddening insistence on the impossible!

Asking that question of a disgraced life convict, who had forfeited his standing even in State prison, lying flat on his face in a musty doghole helpless, hopeless!

Again did Sergeant Douglass express his opinion in untrammeled fashion.

"S-s-s-sh!" fizzed the gentleman who had been serving as chorus. "He's a friend of mine and you hurt my feelings."

"I'm the only friend he's got," stated the other, "and it's the same the other way about. There isn't a human being outside who'll turn a finger for us. But you have outside friends, bo!"

In his despair Douglass swore at him.

But the other remained calm. "How about the little Jane with the rosy cheeks? Oh, boy! What can't a dame with *her* looks do?"

"S-s-s-s—sure!"

"Damn you!" shrieked Douglass. "I'll come through this door, even if I have to gnaw through with my teeth. One more word on that point and I'll kill you!"

"I think the talk has gone far enough for one session, Tudge," remarked the chief speaker. "Besides, I've been lying on this floor so long I've got dust in my pipes. They're careless about their housekeeping in this doghole. But one last word to you, friend, in the next cage! There's something for sale around these diggings. You'd better do some tall thinking as to how you'll raise the price!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Brothers o' Spinkle's Chimney

by Francis James

A MAN sat cross-legged on the sail-cloth. Opposite him a strange, long-limbed figure lolled on a stone, half leaning against the rocky wall of the cave.

The man had been reading from a tattered volume, discolored by salt water. At the end of the poem, he looked up, his finger marking the place.

"And that's all of that one!" he exclaimed. It was perhaps the five hundredth time that he had read it aloud, yet his eyes sparkled with excitement. "It's a great story, Freddy, that one of old Macaulay's. You know that, don't you, even if you can't say so? It's about a famous soldier. His name was Hora-*ti*-us. He lived thousands of years ago, and when all the others had run away out of the fight he stayed on the bridge alone and saved the city.

"Want me to read it again, Freddy? Well, so I will. You keep full quiet, boy, same's before. Or wait; here's something else you like. You haven't heard it for a long time. Give heed, now—"

He read slowly and painstakingly, with occasionally odd phrasings and mispronunciations, like a student who had been self-

taught. His great forefingers with its square, cracked nail traced out the lines:

Little Bo-Peep
Has lost her sheep—

The listener, who at the stoppage of the famous old heroic ballad, had begun to jerk and twitch in a curious way with all his limbs, instantly became motionless. His face beamed with delight.

Yet his countenance was swept by a veil. It was as though a fine, beclouding brush had laid a blear of vacancy like a gossamer film over the intelligence; all-covering, but withal so thin that the mind, struggling like the sun under light clouds, occasionally peeped through.

For fully ten minutes the man droned on through rimes of Mother Goose, one after the other. At the end, the boy, who meanwhile had not moved, scrambled to his feet. Grimaces of delight convulsed his features. Throaty, inarticulate cries issued from his mouth. His figure writhed like a dancing skeleton as he shambled forward.

With a sigh the man put down the book.

"Poor, poor, Freddy!" he murmured. He seemed to be speaking half to the other, half to himself. It might have been a habit he had acquired through long association. "Nineteen year old, and never a word out of you! Nigh onto a man, and gigglin' at a baby's story book!"

He put his hands, with a half clumsy gesture of affection, on the fellow's shoulders, and looked him earnestly in the eye.

"But you're full of it, all the same—burstin' with things you want to say. And if you could, it's something worthwhile that you'd get out, I'll warrant! Nobody can tell me you're an empty tomato-can. But wait, boy! You don't know what's going to happen! Nobody knows, hardly. And then—"

Forcing a laugh, the man got briskly to his feet.

"So much for the fun. We've read and we've talked. Now to work. Hand me that lantern over there, Fred, and the oil-can, and we'll get ready for the night's business. Not that I think you know so much about that—though you may be fooling me—nor anyone else, either. There's plenty not so far from here would give their eye-teeth for a tip. There; that's fine! Now sit here side of me while I do this—"

As he chatted, the man had taken a seat on a flat stone near the mouth of the cave and busied himself cleaning and filling the large and powerful lantern the boy handed him.

"For a sight of me at midnight, I mean," he rambled on, "and a sparkle o' my light. But that they'll never have, will they, Fred? Jealous rascals, the lot of them! You wouldn't tell, would you? Nor show 'em, either. In five minutes now, when this is done and put away, you'll sit down opposite me here by the window where we can see the water, and I'll spin you one last yarn before we go, about a fine ship that was lost at sea—"

The cave in which the pair sat was a vast cavern, stretching back indefinitely, undermining both the cliff and the rolling meadow land behind. Neither of them had explored it very far, because the floor sloped sharply downward and the black darkness in the rear was full of the sound of trickling waters.

From the entrance the view swung through three points of the compass. South to North it was a flat and curving pearl-white rim of water clapped hard under an upside-down bowl of topless blue.

Their door was a window in the cliff. It was wedge-shaped, this cliff, like the Flat-iron Building ten times magnified, jutting out into the water from the main mass of shore-buttressing rocks. Its sides were coal-black, glistening with oozing water and riven with huge chasms. The summit was needle-peaked, twelve hundred feet above high tide. A goat would skid hopelessly from its safest point.

Yet its opening, at whose verge the two now quietly sat, was one-fifth of the way down the sheer, front, knifelike edge. All about it the gulls circled with their harsh cries, and the roar of the surf at the foot was hushed into a murmur. The man was telling the story of a wreck in the South Seas, knowing that he would not be interrupted; for in the whole of the fishing village of West Cove, in all the fishing villages up and down the coast, none but these two knew of its existence.

Its arrangement showed that it was much used. Along one side the lanterns and oil-cans were ranged. A square of heavy canvas covered the fore-part of the rough, damp floor. In one corner a rude wooden shelf was loaded with games and books. Some gaudy lithographed prints were spiked on the rocky wall. The place had a curious air of roughness and refinement, of pleasure and business, of leisure and of danger all combined.

Like all else in the community of West Cove, except the rolling, daisied meadows, Larkin's general store was grey and cheerless. Nevertheless, around 5 P.M. of every day it was also Mecca, because that was the hour at which the stage, sole connective between the cove and the outer universe, was due to rumble in.

Thus the male section of the population had enough to look forward to from the night before to keep it idle through all the intervening hours. Knotted on the steps, festooned over the fences thereto abutting, it made the occasion a clearing-house of business and gossip. Men who scarcely nodded at other times nudged up and passed the weather.

"How's haulin'?" observed Starling to Jake Darrance. Starling was a wizen little stick with an enormous quid bulging his cheek, while Darrance figured as the town giant — a surly chap of perhaps twenty, in leather waistcoat and knee boots. He pulled his cap farther over his eyes and squinted down the road before he growled:

"Haulin' what? Spanners are tongue-cheap. As fer real fish, there ain't none—nowheres."

"Thought ye'd say thet!" chuckled Starling. "Eastrup, he gets 'em though."

"Eastrup!" snorted Darrance. "The Devil! A witch for a grandmother—"

"Soft-spoken for the Old 'Un," someone interjected. "Perfesser, more likely. Full o' books."

"Foster-granny," corrected the neighbor on his right. "Washed ashore fr'm a wreck, Larry was. Old woman McGann, she hauled him out half dead—"

"Orter hev left him be!" snarled Darrance.

"Wouldn't 'a' drowned," barked another. "Hed a book in 's pocket; told him how to walk on water—"

"—and brung him up," finished the first speaker imperturbably, in spite of the general laugh. "Then when he growed up, he went off and married Stella Burns an' left the old woman alone again. Now she hates him fer that, an' him an' Stella lives off up there like—"

"Don't blame him none," broke in another. "Who'd want to bide in the same walls with that old screechin' owl? Besides, Stella, she hadn't no steady comp'ny—shame when a pretty girl like her has to put up with sech as him because she can't get no handsome feller—"

"Shut up, you!" roared Darrance, reaching behind to beat the speaker's shoulder with a ham-like palm. "He cut me out, the bloater, 'n' you know it. I'd orter hev skinned him fer it. Sometime I'm a-goin' to. Stella, she—"

"What 'r' ye waitin' fer? The gal's young yet. Him out o' the way"— The voice was sarcastic, banteringly derisive.

"I'm clean sensible o' that," retorted Darrance seriously. "But I'm merried now. Stella, she'd as good as promised me, when up he comes from McGann's old shack a couple o' nights with his fine talk—"

"Where'd he git it? There's no larnin' in West Cove."

"Books," asserted Starling. "Box of 'em washed ashore. Took to 'em natural. Taught hisself, they say. Or else the witch—"

"From Ireland, wa'nt she?" queried one in half awed-tones. "They say the old women over there that lives in the villages by the sea-shore all their lives learns of the devil. She could teach him anything, she could."

"How to ketch fish 'thout a net?"

"Goes and sings. I suppose he does, and they jump out ashore."

"Sings?"

"Sure. Seen *her*, ain't ye, 'top o' the cliff at sun-down, with her hair shook loose and her arms wavin'—"

"Shucks!" blurted several all together, "I don't believe—"

"Why don't she larn the other one to talk, then?"

There was a guffaw. It was Darrance who had put the question. "He's out of her own blood, too. Own grandson, ain't he?"

"Yes."

"Then that's easy. Her and Eastrup has got all the brains, so brother Freddy's head is full of soup."

There was a general laugh—not mirthful, but raucous with an undercurrent of hostility. For a moment silence followed.

"Had eight hundred o' pollack down b' the wharf t'other mornin', Eastrup did," broke out Starling suddenly. "I didn't see as nobody else— How many you shipped this week, Mr. Darrance?"

The big fellow scowled and made no answer. Starling slipped off the fence and faced a group of three or four.

"What I want to know is, how he—"

"Here he comes," averred a man from the doorstep. "Him and his dog behind. You c'n ask him, if you want to. Me, I don't haul no fish, but ef I was dependin' on it fer my wants, damned ef I'd let a pair o' loons lug off my dinner from b'neath my nose. Some o' you boys that's goin' broke—"

"Hedge-hogs, both of 'em," snapped another. "Orter run 'em out. You do it, Jakey. Go ahead. Go 's far as—"

Starling urged the big fellow forward with his hand on his shoulder.

"Tell him—" he whispered. "We'll back ye—"

Growling, Darrance threw him off.

"I'll tell him! Don't I know? He's yanked a ton sence I've smelled a fin. I'll hev an answer fr'm his hide or I'll drag it off!"

Hands in his pockets, he hitched up his breeches and sidled into the road.

Eastrup was drawing near, gaging his gait by the shuffling figure at his heels. Darrance swaggered in front, blocking his path.

"Hello, Eastrup," he greeted. Mock friendliness was in his tone, but the light of his eyes was evil. "How's haulin'?"

"Haven't set a net to-day, Jake," countered the other, meeting his eye mildly. "How's yours?"

"Hell!" The big fellow's snarling laugh was echoed from the fence. "Mine! Not me ner nobody has saw nothing but greasers fer half a month. You're haulin' a ton a week. Don't lie. I know. We all know." He shuffled a stride closer. "Come on! How do *ye* get 'em? Where do ye set? Huccome none of us sees ye goin' ner comin' back, mornin' er night?"

As the bully went on talking his rage fanned itself hotter. His tone had become threatening, and his great red face had worked itself down closer and closer to Eastrup's.

"Gawd's life, we're sick of it, we are! This ketchin' of fish where there ain't none, and without no nets. We wants to know—"

Eastrup interrupted him.

"You've got no call to brace me up like this, Jake," he remonstrated mildly. "You've got your own ways of fishin' and I've got mine. Your luck may be bad now, but it will turn. Inside of a week, perhaps, you'll get 'em all, and I nothing."

Darrance looked around and grinned significantly at the crowd, which guffawed understandingly. West Cove was known widely for its fights—bitter, bruising mills, in which blood spurted, faces hammered out of human likeness, and quarter neither asked nor given. No beating could have been more utterly to the stomach of the assembled gang than the one which Darrance was about to give to Eastrup.

"That's what we mean," he broke in. "You don't seem to understand very well, Eastrup. We're a-goin' to hev it changed, but not next week. To-night. To-morrer we expects to pull as big a load as you. Bigger, maybe. No reason why. All easy. Half a dozen words—"

Eastrup started.

"If what you're trying to say is that you want me to tell you—"

"Why, now ye guessed it, didn't ye?" exclaimed the big man, with labored irony. "But fer a book-learned feller ye was devilish slow. I'd hev thought—"

"I won't," finished Eastrup quietly. "You chaps are too lazy and stupid to do any thinking for yourselves. You fish the same way all year around, and then if someone else gets ahead of you—

"See here!"

Darrance's face had grown horrible with rage. His great back curved over the smaller man like the tensely drawn arc of an archer's bow. The listeners on the fence stopped chuckling and swapping comments. It fell suddenly quiet but for the blubbering of the half-witted mute dancing excitedly behind Eastrup.

"See here!" The big man's fingers, like eagle's talons, shot out and clutched the other's shoulder. "Listen! You're the only man that's ketchin' fish here at West Cove. The rest of us needs livin' as much as you. Ef you git 'em from the devil, like some of the boys back there was guessin', say so, and we'll tie ye heels to nose and drop ye off o' Sprinkle's Chimney. Ef ye've got some trick that the rest of us can use, that words will tell about, let's have it, here and now. Ef ye say no, God damn ye, ye'll never get home past this fence, that's all."

"The law'll have you if you take a life," warned Eastrup evenly. "There's witnesses back there—"

"Witnesses! Witnesses with empty fish nets! Fifty of 'em to swear that I never put a finger to ye! Damn ye, they *told* me to do it! Answer up!"

The break came with amazing suddenness. It was the dumb boy, Fred McGann. From the beginning of the affair, he had, without attracting the attention of anyone, been shuffling and chattering excited circles about the men. As Darrance shot out his last words, he happened to be directly behind him.

Suddenly he stopped, whirled, and clawing like a cat, sprang on to his back. His bony, sinewy arms locked round the big man's neck. His legs twined about his knees. For a moment of blank surprise the crowd was silent, then roared with laughter.

Darrance, belching an oath, flung his hands behind him. It was a matter of seconds to wrench the boy off. Then he gripped him about the middle with all ten fingers, swung him like a log as high as his head, and flung him to the ground. His boot, swinging like a college punter's, crashed into his side.

Larry Eastrup, who looked like a pigmy beside Darrance, was yet six feet tall, weighed two hundred pounds, and could move quickly. His straight left, the next second, was like an adder's spring, and as accurate. The audience on the door-step and the fences heard that red-blooded sound, the thud and snap of an iron fist making crushed tomato of a human nose, then the scraping crash of Darrance's fall.

Eastrup pulled the boy to his feet and turned toward the crowd.

"There's your man. He was a brute and a foul fighter. That kind always go down easy. Now some of you that are friends of his, tell him when he can listen that I say: let him lay so much as his finger on this boy again and I'll send him to hell ahead of schedule!"

When Eastrup, carrying his foster-brother in his arms, came to the house, a little farther on, where the boy lived, old woman McGann was weeding cabbages in the front yard. She straightened her bent shoulders and peered at him curiously.

"Eh, now, what devilment—" she piped.

"There was a fight. Jake Darrance knocked Fred down and kicked him. I am afraid—"

"May the eyes of the devil singe his hair! And you, sweet grandson, you, you—"

Grimacing, her long white hair blowing awry, she shuffled up and glared into the big man's face. Scarcely came she to his shoulder, so wizened and crooked was she, yet her eyes burned like ever-so-cold blue caverns in a white iceberg's bosom.

"I knocked him senseless. I broke his nose. I mashed it like a strawberry, grandmother."

Neysa McGann broke into harsh, quavering laughter.

"Ah! Then good for him! Good for him! Good, I say! It shall be thee, sweet grandson, instead of him, whom the devils of merwomen shall pull from your boat with songs, down to their halls. The curse of Wangha on thee for an ungrateful—Bring him in! Why stand ye there, gaping like a love-sick cow?"

In five minutes Eastrup, having left his foster brother on the bed, escaped from the cottage and started plodding up the long hill

to his own house. It was the highest roof in the village. In a crevice of the black mountain overhanging the cove it lodged like a swallow's nest. The house was a tiny thing, but painted white, with green blinds and a bright flower-bed in front.

His wife was waiting for him, kissed him when he crossed the threshold, but did not offer to take his coat nor his great boots. In all the other houses round about, wives waited on their men when they came in, but did not look up to be kissed. There were three rooms in the house instead of one as usual, books on the table, pictures on the walls.

Stella Eastrup looked worried when her husband finished telling her of the trouble in the village. They were still sitting opposite each other at the table, supper finished.

"Larry, I'm afraid of Jake Darrance," she murmured. "He's—"

"A coward. No man who would do the thing he did is worth worrying over."

"But the blow in the dark, you know. If he's a coward, he's sneaky, too. He's never forgiven you—or me—"

Reaching around the table, Eastrup pulled his wife over onto his knees.

"He's never forgiven you for marrying me instead of him, nor me for catching you," he laughed. "I wonder if you have ever been sorry—he's almost a foot taller—"

She crushed her fingers over his lips.

"S-h-h-h! No woman in West Cove is as happy as I. None has such a man. No two are finding the happiness that we are in the good that we are trying to do—and succeeding—"

"Sometimes I doubt," he murmured a trifle sadly. "Sometimes I doubt—I wonder if I am right—"

"You are," she whispered, clasping her arms about his neck. "I know you are. And better than my life I love and honor yours, my husband."

The same doctor, fetched thirty miles from Tiverton, ministered at one o'clock that night to both Darrance's nose and the dumb boy's fractured rib. He gave each the same ten days in bed, shook his head at the iniquity of the village as he lighted his pipe, and drove away.

The next morning, Darrance, having knocked down the pale-cheeked girl whom after his disappointment with Stella, he had eventually married, appeared, bandaged beyond recognizing, in the square, and eased himself down on Larkin's step. His cronies shortly gathered around and gloated over his wrath at Eastrup's message.

"Blast the green-livered crab!" he foamed. "Leave me a week to get my head back, and I'll mash him to mush, boy or no boy!"

Neysa McGann, thin as a bone-bag, grinning like a witch, heard him as she passed out with tea, and whirled.

"Rocks! Needles of rocks! Hard and sharp! Cold as your heart! Black as your soul, with white and green water hiding the dead men underneath them! Nothing so cruel, nothing so hungry, as water and crags! Go down and look at them, close to the shore, Jake Darrance, with the one eye you can pull that doctor's cloth from off of! Pick out the one you'll fall on; mark the point where your head will strike! Hearken to the song of the green water lapping over it! In Garragh village, too, where I was born, 'twas the way murderers—"

"Hell-cat!" screamed Darrance, leaping to his feet. "Mother of devils! What do you mean, 'murderer'? Spit another word, grey hag, and I'll—"

The old woman came up so close that the spears of her grey hair, upright on her head, almost touched his chin.

"You are afraid. Your stomach is turned to bile with terror. You know that if you strike me the water-banshees will begin to call. Every time that a boat's bottom bears you, you will hear their song. It is the way they beckon to men about to be drowned on sinking ships. When you see their white arms reaching out of the green foam, you will go—humph! An old woman who has lost ten sons at sea spits in your face, coward!"

Two hours later the steamer pulled up to the wharf on its daily trip down the coast to collect fish. Only a sprinkling of men were present. No one except Larry Eastrup had anything to sell. His dory was piled high with fat, white-bellied flounders. Although half a dozen had been on watch, none of

them had been quick enough to see what direction he came from.

"What's ailin' the rest of ye?" bantered the captain. "Every day is Eastrup's day. He's Jonah to ye. Ye'll have to throw him over, boys, ere ye'll haul again!"

"What!" cried Darrance, starting up. "What's that?"

"There's a story old sea-dogs tell," laughed the skipper. "Sometimes a fellow on board a ship brings 'em bad luck, they think. So, come a dark night with a slippery deck, next mornin' he can't be found. Only a yarn, of course—all foolishness."

He laughed again, uneasily, sensing the bad spirit abroad. "Well, only joking, boys,—good luck to all!"

Eastrup, laughing, sang out: "Good luck" and: "See you to-morrow!" Then he noticed that the others standing around were all grey-faced and silent. Darrance's fingers were knitted white as he scowled at the planking down before him. Two or three more were talking together softly. Stuffing the pay for the fish into his pocket, Eastrup got into his dory and rowed away.

For a week after that Darrance was not seen in the street from morning to night of any day. His friends said he was in bed, recovering from his hurt. But Neysa McGann, hovering about the tree shadows like a ghost, twice saw him, coming from the mountain, enter his gate just before dawn.

A few days later, returning one afternoon from a trip to Tiverton, Eastrup stopped at his foster-mother's to see Fred.

"He's wild at the sight o' ye, now ain't he?" muttered the old crone testily, hands on her hips and head wagging side to side. "God's truth, he loves ye dear, that poor shadow of a b'y, an' never a thought o' what he almost come to, side o' your ballyhooin'. A ripe good beatin' it was ye gave the bully, the way he'd ought not to be troublin' you a long time comin'. But he's main sore about the fishin', himself is."

She shot him a bird-like glance. "Do ye be carryin' a weapon, the time you're walkin' the roads at dark? Or a good stick ahead of you to poke out the shadows in the rocks, along the cliff edge? Half a score full o' lads and men have I raised up and seen go out to sea since I was a young girl at Garragh village with the sunshine on my yellow hair. The water-women have pulled them all down, all, and it's you last two I'm wantin' to be keepin', the way I'll have someone besides the priest to look down on me when I'm buried in my grave. Is it careful ye are, Lawrence Eastrup, whom I pulled like a drowned rat out of the waves and brought up to be my son, careful for the sake of—"

"It's main careful I am, Mother Neysa. There's no surprise can catch me, that I promise you."

Sudden rage seemed to seize her at his answer. Her eyes flashed as she stepped back, and her features knotted into a grimace.

"Well, then away with you! Get out! Clear out of my house, you robber. Don't let me see your face! May the fiend strike you for an idle loafer! May all the devils of—"

But Eastrup, long since familiar with the old woman's meaningless tirades, was half way up the hill. He did not know that from the cover of her door-frame she watched him out of sight, and after that had gone in and folded the chattering imbecile in her wiry old arms.

By degrees West Cove settled back to normal. Darrance, his face restored as much as it would ever be, returned to Larkin's steps. Fred McGann, the dumb, half-witted boy, got well of the pain in his side and began again to shamble and gawk about the village, roosting like a human jackdaw for hours at a time on the end of the spare counter at the store, eavesdropping without rebuff at private conversations, thrusting himself with an insatiable curiosity into the midst of whatever was going on.

For hours at a time he would disappear. Farmers occasionally caught sight of him rambling through the fields. Fishermen passing up and down the shore saw his ungainly, fluttering figure against the sky-line. Like the birds, he came and went unnoticed. Yet dusk never failed to find him back at the cottage, sitting opposite the old woman, his grandmother, and the nightly supper of tea and porridge.

Unfailingly, however, at a given hour of every day, he and Eastrup made their way

separately to the cave in Spinkle's Chimney, where the man amused him with games and stories, or allowed him to help about the daily tasks. After that they returned together. Their appearance in the street attracted no attention. Darrance, meeting them, passed without speaking or exchanging looks.

Outwardly, peace and good-will had enfolded the village in brooding wings. Inwardly, it soured, watched, schemed, and waited. No one had forgotten.

Darrance and his pallid little wife lived not many stone throws from Neysa McGann's grey, rambling cottage. Between the two women a curious friendship by degrees sprang up. The big man was under his own roof but little, and in the hours of his absence stark loneliness and the crushing burden of work beyond her strength drove the woman out of doors.

Down at her haunt in the rocks she would find the white-haired crone. Sitting, cross-legged, she usually was, on a broad, flat boulder, hidden from sight of the road. Her apron was thrown over her head; she rocked slowly back and forth. Sometimes she crooned a strange, monotonous song.

"What are you singing, Granny Neysa?" the girl asked one day.

The old woman clasped her wrist, and pulled her down beside her.

"Eh!" she exclaimed. "Here again! Spinners enough, enough, God's will! What am I singing? A song I learned when I was a girl. The old women in county Garragh sang it, the time a storm was moaning and their men would be fetched in from the sea. Look you, girl, what do you see out yonder, half way across the cove to the green hill, where the black rock stands up above the water? Nothing but foam, eh—green and white? Ah! There was a wave breaking. Didst not see the white drops dancing? That was—"

The girl's hand, pointing at the waves, came before her eyes. She snatched at the slender wrist, pushed up the sleeve.

"Another mark! Wirra, wirra! Did that black brute of yours—"

Silently the girl bared her arms, both to the shoulder, and her neck and bosom.

"At night," she whispered, "he's always away, lately. I am glad of that. But mornings when he comes back he seems disappointed about something. He is cross, and cannot sleep because of the pain in his face. Then—"

"Ah!" breathed the old woman sharply. "Away nights, eh, did you say? Every night?"

"Yes."

"Every night, then, since he was hurt?"

"Yes. Almost every night."

"Where? What doing?"

"I don't know. He never says. But if he falls asleep he mutters a man's name and curses him."

"That name," broke in the old woman quickly, "would be my rascally son Larry's? Eh?"

"Yes. But last night he slept and did not cry out. And this morning he smiled at me and did not beat me when he left. I did not understand, but something about that smile made me afraid. I had rather he had flogged—"

Suddenly the girl burst into tears and flung herself into the old woman's arms. Almost roughly the crone pushed her back and held her by the shoulders, fixing her with a fierce glance.

"Beatings every night, eh, till the last, and then a smile! What did he say, muttering to himself as he went out? What name did he murmur, eh, girl?"

"Nothing," quavered the other, shrinking from the look. "Nothing that I heard."

It was near sun-down when this talk began, and now it had gotten blue-black dark.

Cat-like, Neysa McGann scrambled to her feet. Her clawish fingers gripped the girl's thin arm cruelly.

"Black the hour, white-faced chit, that ye knew this thing and did not come running to tell me of it! Black the thoughts that will swarm like fishes into your mind, noon and night! Black the rocks where the sea-maidens will be calling, calling! Get ye home, girl, get ye to your knees and pray that the devil send not harm to curse ye for the death of a good man this night! As for me—hurry, girl, hurry, and give me your hand back to the road!"

As soon as Neysa McGann had seen the last of the girl at her door, she hurried back to her own cottage. Before she did anything else she must get supper for herself and for the boy.

Entering, she called him shrilly, as was her wont, but there was no answer. Half running and still calling, she searched the two rooms and the tiny out-shed. He was not there. In all his life it was the first time he had been away after dark. Going to the door, she peered up and down the road anxiously, although it was impossible to see ten yards in the thick dusk.

Then after a moment, without eating anything herself, she slammed the gate behind her and with her cane in her hand, started clambering up the rocky path that led to Eastrup's house. Though his windows were in plain sight from hers, and on bright days she could catch the crimson flare of poppies in the garden, she had never before turned her steps toward them.

But she arrived, after all, too late. Larry had already gone, Stella said. Much earlier than usual, as he had a special errand. What was the matter?

"Fetch me a cup of tea, and hold your tongue!" snapped the old woman. "Half way up a mountain I come clambering, with my old legs like sticks and no breath in me at all, just that an impudent hussy should ask me what is the matter! Mercy, girl! May God bless us an' morning send not grief too deep to bear!"

"Why? What? What is it?"

The old woman had tottered to a bed and thrown herself down.

"'What? What?' What me no whats!" she mimicked bitterly. "Get the tea, put no sugar in it, bring it here, then let me rest. Here I stay till morning. As for you, girl, bolt you your doors, light the two candles before your shrine, and, as you love God, let not prayer forsake your lips the night!"

Not daring to ask another question, the girl got the hot drink for her guest and set the candles going. Then, feeling that she would have to scream if she stayed a moment longer in the tiny, close-shut room, she went out on the porch.

The night was calm and thick. Not a breath of wind stirred, and a spectral, gray-white fog had choked the valleys and was thickening upward toward the peaks. A mile below, the surf boomed and grumbled against the cliffs. From the cove, the measured click-click-click of oars fetching up between wooden thole-pins told of a solitary dory coming in. For the rest, nothing—not a light, not a sound; only the deep-roaring silence all about.

Standing still, her hands wrapped in her apron, Stella Eastrup glanced back into the kitchen where the candles were burning steadily and where, in the room beyond, the old woman drowsed and muttered on the bed. Then she sank down on the rough boards, leaned against the corner post, and began to pray. After a long time, having said all the prayers she knew and wept her apron damp, she fell asleep.

Hours later, senses tingling, she started suddenly awake. She was shivering with cold. The wind, changing to the north, had blown the fog away. A wisp of moon hung over the cliffs, and a brilliant star gleamed near it. The old woman was standing at her shoulder.

"Ye slept!" accused the crone. "The candles have gone out. Faithless, like all—Hark!"

Crouching beside her on the step, she gripped her shoulder, pointing over it a gnarled finger. "Canst hear them singing?"

"No!" shivered the girl. "Hear what?"

"The water-women. Banshees crooning their songs. They—"

"It is the wind!" interrupted the girl, "moaning around the cliffs. And the waves breaking. There is no such thing!"

The crone laughed cacklingly.

"That is what say those who have no ears to hear. The old women know—they who have lost sons at sea."

"There is going to be a storm!" exclaimed the girl irritably. "It always sounds like that—"

"Aye. A storm. There comes the wind." A puff beat in their faces. "That is their time. Their hair is the spray from the green waves, and with their white arms they cling around men's necks—"

Abruptly the girl got to her feet and went inside the house.

"Keep still!" she snapped. "Down in

the village they say you are a witch, and I believe you are. You make my blood cold with your curses, but it's all lies. You haven't told me a thing except—"

Angrily the crone broke in.

"Fool! Because you are a young upstart with red blood in you, you think—here, I'll tell you, if you want to know—death! That's what! Listen outside! Hear the wind rage! If you were there now it would blow you off! Down below somewhere, out beyond the rocks, your man is. They are after him! I hear the call. I have heard it before, and I know. It never fails. In the morning they will bring him in—"

"You lie!" screamed the wife. "He has the light! He is strong! He knows the way. At dawn he will be here, as always—"

A slug of wind like a solid wall smashed against the house, making it shudder, and driving the women, staggering, together.

"There!" cried the crone. "Did ever wind strike like that before? Did—"

Following the blast had come a pocket of calm. For ten seconds possibly the air was as motionless as at sun-set. During that moment the scream rang out. Both heard it—faint and far-borne, but unmistakable. It was quavering and long-drawn with fear and agony—the cry of a man facing sudden and terrible death.

As the hurricane of wind and rain crashed down again, the old woman McGann lifted the limp form of her son's wife from the floor and laid it on the bed. Falling back a step, she crossed herself and then sank in a chair at the girl's side.

Throughout the six hours to dawn, with the worst storm that West Cove had ever known rocking the house, she sat there. For the most part the girl seemed sunk in lethargy. Occasionally she stirred and moaned, mouthing over her husband's name. Finally, just as the dark was breaking in the east, she sat bolt up, eyes wide.

"What time is it?"

"Six o'clock."

"Larry?"

"Not come. Hearken!"

Outside the wind was humming in a note like the vibration of a gigantic violin. The roar of the rain on the low roof made talking difficult. Through the window you could not see ten feet into the driving wall.

Stella got up. "I'm going down."

"Where?"

"To the village."

"Well said!" shrilled the old woman, making herself heard over the uproar. "Spoken like a true seaman's wife. The time we get there, with the tide setting in, and the light coming, they'll be finding him—"

"Quiet, you devil!" screamed the girl, whirling on her. "My man's not dead! It was the storm kept him away. He'll be there, laughing at them!"

Holding to each other for safety, they made the steep descent. By the time they arrived in the village it had become quite light, and the rain had more than half stopped. The roar of the surf on the cliffs outside the cove was deafening, and even on the rocks behind the houses the great rollers coming in through the narrow entrance burst thunderously.

Nevertheless there was a great crowd gathered there. Not one was missing from the whole village. They stood in a wide circle back from the spray, mostly silent on account of the noise, but with some shouts going back and forth among the men. A few of the deep sea fishermen, not afraid to get wet, stood on the tops of high rocks with their long spy-glasses.

Neysa McGann elbowed her way through till she stood in front.

"On the rocks, outside he'd be," she shrilled into the ears of Starling, her next neighbor. "They'd ought to be sending out lookers—"

"We have," he bawled. "A dozen, up and down, since dawn."

Down at the far right a cry rang out. By those next to it it was taken up and passed along the line, clear round the circle. Just inside the boulders marking the entrance of the cove a black knot of men appeared, huddled, stooped, and walking slowly. In their midst they carried a heavy object, almost dropping it as they stumbled over the rough-going.

They were a long time approaching, sometimes out of sight behind the rocks, again hidden by the crowd. As Stella Eastrup

waited, she was aware of the glances of the women on either side. They were looking at her curiously, flinging to and fro behind her snatches of impudent gossip.

Someone gripped her elbow and pulled her round. Dully she was aware that a dark object lay on the ground beside her. she looked down.

The clothing had been half torn off by the rocks. The hair was matted over the face. From the ragged hole in the forehead blood still trickled.

She knelt in the pool of water at his side. Gently she drew the clotted locks from off the face, and with a strip of her underskirt started to wash away the blood. So busy was she that the ominous silence round about made no impression. And it was the old woman who first found her senses.

"'Tis not himself!" she shrieked. "'Tis that foul fiend—"

"Darrance!" screamed the girl, reeling back. "Where—"

A roar of laughter shook the crowd.

"Aye—Darrance it is," croaked Starling, thrusting his yellow grin into her face. "A great surprise, eh, not? How do you think—"

"You know!" accused the girl. "What do you all mean? Where is my husband? Does anybody know?"

"Anybody?" rasped out the little man. "Look there!"

Parting somewhere, the crowd pushed him forward. He was wet, weary, tattered, but unharmed. With a little run his wife thrust aside the hands that tried to stop her, and threw herself into his arms.

"Larry!" she implored, "what is it? What about Darrance? Why are they holding you? Why did they laugh?"

Eastrup put his arm about her.

"They—"

"What? Why?" mimicked Starling, pushing between them. "Because he's a murderer, your precious man, that's why."

"A lie! What do you mean?"

He gestured at the figure on the ground.

"Jake here, had his life threatened, summat a month back. Enough of us heered what passed from your man to him. Last night he went out for a little, never showed up again. Your man was out, too; several on us will swear to that. Indurin' of the night, comes a yell. Somebody knifed, no less. Just before dawn, Eastrup shows up, safe and sound, storm or none. Jake bein' gone, we havin' heered the cry an' knowin' the trouble there was stewin' some of us held on to him. Now—" He raised his voice. "What say, friends—proof enough?"

A murmur, swelling to a roar, welled up from the group before him, and ran round the circle.

Starling turned to the woman.

"Ye see—jedged by his peers?"

"Judged!" she screamed. "That's no judgment! It's conspiracy! You have plotted it! You all hate him because he has brains and you have not! I'll have you hung if you don't let him go! You don't dare go on with it! The court will—"

"Court?" gibed the man savagely, sweeping his arm about. "Here's the court, woman. We're all the jury. Ye heered the sentence."

"Sentence! Without a chance! My man fights fair! If Darrance was killed it wasn't he that did it. The man might have fallen off the cliff! It might be a hundred things!"

"It might be, but it wa'n't," snapped Starling. "The case is done, an' judgment passed. If ye try to interfere—"

"What are you going to do to him?"

"Ye've heered how they punish murderers, aint ye?" he leered back. "West Cove aint up to date as some, but we managed to find a rope—"

There was an interruption. Old woman McGann, dragging behind her the half-witted boy, had pushed into the circle and confronted Starling.

"God's curse on your black soul!" she shrilled. "Many the rough years I have lived at home and here, and hard deeds witnessed, but sorra the day I see cowards butcher a man without a dog's chance because he is their better! Answer me one question, Tom Starling, before you call your murderers, as you will lie some day in the damp ground with your flesh rotten on your bones: Do ye seek the truth of this thing truly, or is it his death ye are set on, and no better than wolves, at all?"

The man fell back a step.

"Truth? What do you know about that, old crone? Did the devil tell ye, or that scare-crow fool of yours—"

For a moment, during the wind's lull, she could be heard. Raising both arms, she cried out to the throng at the top of her shrill lungs:

"This way, this way, all, and see God's miracle that he has showed the boy! Lead on, Freddy; show us what you found. We'll follow."

Shambling and gesticulating, the half-wit turned. The crowd opened to let him pass. Without once looking back, he started off rapidly, leading the way up from the beach toward the high rolling fields that framed the town. Beside him, as close as she could keep, hurried the old woman, with Starling breathless and superstitiously half fearful at her side.

Spreading out into a long scattered train, the crowd followed. Eastrup's wife had slipped her hand in his, and no one prevented her from walking at his side. They were close up to the leaders.

"What is it, Larry?" she whispered to him. "What has he found?"

"I don't know," he murmured. "Everything was as usual, except—"

Up ahead a commotion had arisen. Far in the lead, Fred McGann, after once reaching the height of land, had turned abruptly to the left, toward the cliffs and sea.

Right ahead the black spear-head of Spinkle's Chimney towered five hundred feet. As Eastrup spoke, the boy had reached the verge and paused for the procession to catch up.

A ring formed about him. Gabbling and chattering, he stood on the brink, beckoning to the men and pointing upward.

"God's life, what does he mean?" gasped Starling. "No mortal man—"

Eastrup pushed forward.

"There's something out there he wants you to see," he said. "If you'll let me go I'll show the way. It's safe enough."

"Not me!" cried Starling. "None but the devil's own—"

Up ahead the boy had already started the ascent. Behind him Eastrup followed a short distance, paused, looked back, and beckoned.

"There's no danger," he shouted, "if you keep close."

"God!" rasped the big farmer over Starling's head. "No man c'n stand 'n' say I was afeared t' foller him! Come on, you lynchers, or else own up you're coward dogs and leave him go!"

With a run he caught up to Eastrup. Others followed, including Starling, to the number of about twenty. Among them were Eastrup's wife and the old woman.

The path they clambered up the huge rock was partly natural, partly constructed of hewn steps. Like a line of ants the long procession crept up and around the corner to the edge where was the entrance to the cave.

The boy was nowhere to be seen when one by one the witnesses began to arrive. Expressions of amazement burst from the lips of each as he mounted the last step and stood inside. Starling was the fourth to come.

"The boy and I have been coming out here for a long time," Eastrup explained. "I used to read to him and tell him stories."

"What 'r' them?" It was the lanterns and oil-cans that the gesture pointed out.

"My lights. When I fished nights I used to put a lantern in the opening there so as to get my bearing for the cove. That was the way I used to get ahead of you. By accident I found a place half a mile dead off where at night no matter what the tide, they'd fill the troll in half an hour. Last night—"

"Trolls, eh? That was why—"

"You never saw my nets. I didn't have any. We used to bait the hooks here and trim the lights."

"Well—"

From the rear, where he had stood in the dark, out of sight, Fred McGann appeared. Pointing at the row of lanterns, he beckoned to Eastrup, making excited, throaty sounds.

"What?" cried several. "What does he want?"

"One's gone!" exclaimed Eastrup. "Used to be six. Now only five."

The boy had gone to the edge of the cove and was pointing down.

"It fell out!"

"Didn't ye miss the light?"

"For a minute of two I couldn't see it. I thought it was a bit of fog had got in the way. Then it was all right again."

"That tells where the boy was, then," piped the old woman. "Never did he come home to his house at all till just this morning, the time we were together on the beach. He was here and lighted another after the first one had blown off."

"Here all night, eh," exclaimed Starling. "Wouldn't think he could have managed to do the thing. I wonder—eh, what's that!"

Again the boy had disappeared and returned with something in his hand.

"Jake's hat!" ejaculated several. "How came *he* here?"

"Last night wasn't the first of his wandering," put in the old woman. "His wife will tell you he has been travelling, travelling, the month back. Listen to the truth now that I'm telling you: It was he that hunted Eastrup, trying by night to beat him down as he walked the dark paths, or find his secret and destroy it. At last he came to the cave and the way in, with the lantern brightly burning. The boy was here.

"Back in the shadows he waited. When the fog cleared and the wind started blowing toward the rocks the black sinner stood in the doorway and kicked out the light, thinking that would be the end of his enemy. But the boy back there, after he had gone lighted another. And Darrance, making his way home in the darkness, slipped and fell."

A chorus of cries interrupted her.

"No! No! It was Eastrup! Coming back, he met him on the cliff and threw him over. That doesn't help him any! You have made it worse for him than it was before!"

The hoarse shouts, taken up by all, filled the great cave, echoing far back into the darkness: "Throw him over! Throw him over!"

Biting his lips, Starling stepped forward and opened his mouth to speak. He was caught up in the whirl of hands and shoulders reaching out for the prisoner, and flung one side. Half a dozen giants made a wedge and smashed through to where Eastrup stood. In a second they had seized him, hands and shoulders, and rushed him half way to the edge.

In that same second a flying figure from the shadows at the side dashed out and stood in front. More than ever did the limbs jerk and shamble. Desperate strivings after speech gurgled from the throat. Poised on the very edge, he faced the mob. Hushed, they realized that he was going through a frenzied pantomine.

First he pointed at Eastrup and shook his head. Then, turning, he went through the motion of kicking violently outward from the cliff's edge. Once more facing his audience, he pointed at himself. Again and yet again he repeated the performance.

"My God!" breathed Starling, "he trying to tell us it was—"

Breaking away, Eastrup had bounded forward, arms outstretched, checking himself on the very fringe of the last edge. A terrible cry rang out from all who saw; then silence settled down. Where the boy had stood the instant before was nothing.

"He fell!" whispered a voice.

"Nay; jumped," said the big farmer softly, crushing his hat in his great hands. "I saw him clear. It was him pushed Darrance off, ye see, and this is his own settlement he's made, instead of Eastrup. Come on, you men, if you feel like men now: we've done enough fine justice for one day, I reckon. God send none of *us* slips, the way back."

Stella Eastrup stole to her husband's side and clasped her arms around his neck.

"How he loved you, Larry—and the time so near!"

Absently Eastrup pulled a tin box from its hiding-place behind the boulder he was leaning on, and opened it.

"There it all is," he murmured dully, "all I've saved from the fishing these three years gone to send him to the hospital! In a month's time longer now—"

"We will go," whispered the woman wistfully, "away from here to the real world that is yours by right. The money will be our start. He—your brother—would have liked that, wouldn't he, if he could have known?"

Eastrup nodded thoughtfully.

Taking the girl's hand, he lead the way out of the cave and down the steps.

Fixed by George

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Everything But the Truth," "Annexing Bill," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OBDURATE ONE.

"WHO was *that?*" escaped the painted lady.

George did not reply; he was still staring at the door.

"Who was that woman?" Angela demanded, shrilly. "Arthur had a woman in his arms!"

Still George had nothing to say. Indeed, he had heard their questions only in the most remote way, as one might have heard questions from another planet.

Because that was Geraldine, who had gone up-stairs, kicking and struggling! Unless he chose to assume that somebody had borrowed Geraldine's hat and shoes and stockings and come here for the sole purpose of confusing him a little further, that was certainly Geraldine herself!

Why had she come? How had she learned his whereabouts? How, too, had she managed to arrive so silently? There had not been so much as the sound of a footfall outdoors before her ringing of the bell. And why the strange clash with Dr. Poole, out there? Why had the massive physician taken upon himself to pick up George's wife and lug her up-stairs?

"Was it?" Margery whispered, calmly enough.

"It was!" said George, from the corner of his mouth.

And what were they doing now, up above? There was nothing fairylike about Dr. Poole's walk; even in the sturdy old house, one could follow his direction quite easily. He was still having trouble with the captive, it seemed; up there somebody kicked sharply at a wall, and there was a stifled little squeal. Then a small chain rattled, as Dr. Poole found the pull for the hall light—and the steps went on, apparently toward the chamber in the far wing.

"You—let—me—" gulped past the doctor's hand.

And a door slammed, aloft, and the silence was complete!

On her couch, Miss Starr was sitting up, wild-eyed again, and quite disheveled.

"I want to know who that woman was!" she stated. "I want to know why Arthur was carrying that woman in his arms!"

"That—lady—" Margery said, with some difficulty, for she was not resourceful when it came to rapid-fire mendacity.

"Where has he taken her?" the girl cried. "I'm going to see! I'm going to find them, and learn—"

The doctor's wife rustled swiftly across the room and caught her.

"No, don't! Lie still. Please lie still. That—that's just a patient of the doctor's; she—she's infatuated with him, I think, and she followed him here!" Margery said happily.

"Will he—"

"He'll be right back; just as soon as he can come. But lie still, please. The doctor said that was important and—there!"

"Isn't she—shameless?" murmured Angela, as she dropped back.

"Oh! *You* think so, do you?" snapped from Mrs. Poole.

"Don't you?"

"You bet I do!" Margery said grimly, and then caught herself with an effort and, since Miss Starr seemed to have subsided, rose abruptly and returned to George Dare.

This story began in The Argosy for February 21.

Miss Woodbury, however, was no calmer. She stared at George, as if trying to read his thoughts. Her tinted fingers drummed on the arms of the chair which she had been unable to dislodge.

"Don't you think you'd better—do as I suggested, now?" she asked agitatedly.

"Not yet," George sighed. "I'm remaining here for a little."

"Why?"

"I have my reasons," George said, darkly and absently, and strained his ears toward the stairway.

What *were* they doing up there? What right had that lumbering hulk of a Poole to heave George's Geraldine about like a bag of meal, anyway? No matter what the circumstances, that had been one of those unwarranted moves which demand quick, full explanation. George flushed slightly and kept on listening, quite vainly—for one minute, for two minutes.

"Where is Arthur?" Miss Starr inquired sharply.

"That's what I'm going to find out myself in about one more minute!" George muttered.

The girl sat up again.

"What do you mean? Why do you speak like that? Where—where *is* Arthur?"

Her voice went high this time, ringing through the still house. Up above, at a distance, footsteps moved hurriedly, and a door opened. Dr. Poole, it seemed, had caught the summons and was returning.

And here he was, by the way, and he seemed rather jarred by something. The doctor's handsome countenance was disfigured by a scowl, and he was biting his lips. His distressed and savage gaze bored into George.

"Go up-stairs!" he said abruptly. "Er—some one there wishes to see you at once. And take your—your wife with you, Dare! Don't come down until you have settled matters in a perfectly satisfactory way and you're certain that there will be no further excitement. Do you understand?"

"Not yet."

"You will!" the doctor said wickedly. "Go!"

Conscience had rendered Margery rather more obedient than of yore. She was already on her feet and beckoning George to follow. At her side he mounted the stairs, while after them floated Angela's querulous:

"Arthur, who was that woman in your arms? I want to know who that woman was!"

George smiled sourly. Secretly, be it said, he was glad that fate had sent them Geraldine. She was one of those wise, rare souls in whom the mother-instinct of protection for the loved is very strong; on more than one occasion she had suggested the safe way out to George, and, privately, he had given thanks.

These things, as a rule, he did not admit even to himself, but he admitted them now quite freely. Indeed, by the time they had attained the top step, something akin to joyful relief pulsed through George. Among all this peculiar crew, Geraldine would hold aloft the shining light of pure reason, Geraldine would understand!

"*She* upset Arthur!" Margery said quite angrily. "Isn't it queer that people cannot understand that a doctor knows best, and they insist on arguing!"

"Very queer!" George said shortly. "I guess she's down here. Yes, there she is!"

Geraldine was backing away from the door as they entered. She kept on backing until she touched the ancient bureau, and there, perforce, she stopped, with hands behind her, and an expression such as George had never seen before. If ice can blister, that sort of ice formed the chief ingredient of Geraldine's expression. She looked George up and down. She looked Margery up and down. The very corners of her nose crinkled high with fury and disgust—but since the single light was poor in there, and George was paying scant attention to expressions, anyway, he hurried forward with a glad cry of:

"Gerry! Gerry, dear, you—"

"You lay just one filthy finger on me, if you dare!" Geraldine said amazingly. "*Just one!*"

George stopped suddenly.

"You—you haven't caught it, too?" he cried. "You're not crazy?"

"What?" Mrs. Dare sneered. "Oh,

hardly that. Grief does that sort of thing, I suppose; but one couldn't be expected to feel grief over losing a thing like—*you!*"

"But—"

"Now, you look here, Gerry!" Margery said quickly, sternly. "We can't have any nonsense from you, you know. There's been too much trouble and excitement here for Arthur's patient, as it is, and you mustn't—"

Her words died in the low, horrid laugh that came from Geraldine. Geraldine's hands came up for an instant, too, fingers outstretched as if to claw at Mrs. Poole—and clutched one another instead as Geraldine said:

"He—he told me that one, and he couldn't make it sound real!" she said, with some difficulty. "And you shake your finger at me like that again, creature, and I—I will not be responsible. *I saw George kissing you!* I was out there on the veranda and I saw *that!*"

"Well, the reason for that—" Margery said briskly.

"Be silent, you brazen—brazen—oh!" Geraldine gasped. "I promised Dr. Poole that I'd remain here for five minutes and listen to you. I'm going that now. If you've anything to say—"

"I have!" George began, energetically. "If you—"

"And don't say anything so offensive to ordinary intelligence as the things Poole tried to tell me!" Geraldine burst out. "Don't try that, please! I used to be simple and credulous, but I've stopped all that!" She smiled hideously at George. "You forgot Hannah, didn't you? You arranged your little evening, you two, with never a suspicion that Hannah might be listening? Well, you antagonized Hannah at *just* the right time, George; she had a fine little rod in pickle for you, and she telephoned me just as soon as you'd left with your—your friend! Well? Well?"

"Well, listen, and—"

"Friend! Hah! *Friend!*" cried Geraldine, who seemed quite bent on listening, as she sliced the very flesh from Margery's bones with her razor-edged glare. "I've often wondered if that friendship was as platonic as—no, that's a lie! I haven't! I've always trusted you, George! Upon my word, I believe that I trusted you up to the very second I saw you sitting there, with her head on your shoulder and your arm around her—*kissing her!*"

"I know. It looks bad, but—" George began desperately.

"And her husband sitting across the room beside *his* friend, complacent and contented with it all!" exclaimed Mrs. Dare, recoiling from the soiled pair. "I—honestly, I couldn't believe that, even when I saw it! I've read of that disgusting sort of thing in—in nasty novels, but I never believed that it existed!"

She wrung her hands; her eyes fairly rolled for a moment. Geraldine was really near distraction. But she controlled herself, and turned her hot gaze upon George once more.

"Well?" she inquired. "Haven't you a word to say for yourself?"

"A lot of them if you will—"

"And such a quaint little surprise party, too!" burst from Geraldine. "Every one here for the night!"

"*What?*"

"Oh, yes, I stumbled on that, too!" the lady assured them bitterly. "*My* driver didn't understand, I fear. I came by train to Arborvale, you know, and took a hack over, and the driver, I fancy, didn't quite catch the idea when your men came to take charge of his car and run it into your garage, wherever that may be. From what I could hear on the veranda, he made quite a struggle, but they took him, too!" Geraldine threw back her head and laughed. "Oh, yes! I guessed that I'm much! I'm clever, don't you think? A good deal cleverer than you fancied."

"This—is the night for twisting things so that they look their worst, anyhow," George said hoarsely. "Will you let me explain?"

"I've been waiting some time for that!"

"Then, in the first place—"

"In the first place, don't lie about it!" Geraldine broke in. "I'll hear the truth! Do you understand that? The *truth!* Never mind the emergency story you doubtless have ready! I want facts! I stood on that veranda for fully fifteen min-

utes before I rang—oh, yes, I saw you start out and change your mind and come back and everything, George; I wasn't twenty feet away from you! And I watched you hug *her* and kiss *her* and—just tell me the truth! How long has this been going on? Hadn't you manhood enough to come to me and tell me you loved her?" Geraldine demanded, and her tone grew thick and hard. "Isn't there plain—plain decency enough in Poole to make it impossible—but there isn't, because he's doing it! I—I wonder if all men—and some few women like you—*can* be like that!"

"Will you—hear the truth?" George managed.

"Yes, but not that thing about the woman on the sofa being a patient and—all that rot! Remember, I've been looking at the painted creature who keeps the place for some time. You might possibly lie your way out of the rest of it, but you can't lie away that paint, and her nakedness, and—ugh!"

"I know! I know!" said George. "I can't explain her myself, because I don't know anything about her except that she's eccentric, and that there's certainly a highly improper look to her. But Margery's here to back me up—" George cried, and waved a quite dramatic hand toward Margery, and then stopped.

It was the first time he had glanced at Margery Poole in some minutes. He had expected to find her cool and collected and ready, as should have been any young woman whose innocence of all wrong was so perfect. Instead, Margery had selected the southeast pillar of the old four-poster for support, and had tottered against it. She stood with one hand clasped at either side of her pretty head, white, mouth-open, eyes blank with horror. As a perfect picture of black guilt, much practise before a mirror might have improved the effect a little—but only a very little.

"Why, Geraldine thinks—Geraldine thinks—she thinks—" Margery gasped.

"Yes, isn't it fortunate that she *does* think once in a while?" Geraldine asked caustically. "Or it's rather unfortunate from your point of view, is it not? If Geraldine hadn't happened to think, these little meetings might have gone on indefinitely! However, she did!—*well?*"

"Gerry," said George shakily, "I can't talk while you talk, you know. I'm not going to bawl you down."

"Oh! Quite a courteous scoundrel, aren't you?" Geraldine sneered. "Go on, then. Only don't try the story about the patient and you and Margery coming here to scare her husband, and all that. That's too ridiculous."

"But it's *so!*"

And now Geraldine flushed fiercely. Multiplied by several hundred, the mild little temper which had started Geraldine toward New Jersey this afternoon was sweeping her into its hot grasp!

"So I'm expected to play the born fool to the very end, am I?" she cried. "Well, it worked this afternoon, when I let you fight with me and get me out of the house so that you could come here, but it doesn't work now, George Dare! You'd like to have me tiptoe out for the—pah!—patient's sake; that's what I understood from Poole. You watch me tiptoe!"

"Gerry! Not so loud! That—girl's reason may—" Margery faltered.

"*That* for her reason!" cried Mrs. Dare, and snapped her fingers furiously. "That girl's a beast who deserves to hear just what I'll tell her, and—"

"But she isn't!"

"Then she's a poor, weak-minded fool who actually doesn't know that Poole is married to you—although how that can be passes me. But if that's what she is, she'll hear the truth in record time!" said Geraldine, as she started for the door. "I promised Arthur I'd stay here and hear what you had to say. I've done that now, and I stick to the little resolution I made on that veranda."

"Res-resolution?" George echoed.

"Yes, I'm going to wreck this pretty little shop, and what I can't do with my tongue I'll do with my hands!" stated Geraldine, who had gone far past all reason. "Oh, this isn't the end of it for you two, of course! You'll have your day in the divorce court as well, but something tells me that that woman down on the sofa is at the bottom of it all. Poole, Heaven knows,

was staid enough a year ago. I want to get at *her*, and—"

"No, Gerry! No, Gerry!" Margery gasped.

With a shock, Geraldine paused in the doorway for an instant.

"You—you're so low that you'd protect her because she makes my husband safe for you!" she said hoarsely. "Come and watch it!"

She was gone now—gone to do what? George Dare literally wrenched himself free of the numbness that was upon him. She was speeding lightly down-stairs, while Margery dragged at his sleeve and choked:

"George! Do something! George! She's out of her head! That girl's—reason! You stop her!"

"I'll try!" mumbled George, as he followed Mrs. Poole.

The long corridor was empty before them; so were the stairs, when they reached their head. Even in these few seconds Geraldine had attained the living-room because there was much moving about in there, as if people were running for cover. The sounds stopped, though, as George and Margery rushed downward. They caught Geraldine's voice—and now they saw Geraldine, standing very erect, sneering down at Angela, who sat upright on the couch.

"Why he carried me up-stairs like that? Is that what you were asking?" she was saying just then. "Well, he did it, my dear, because I insisted upon coming in here and creating a real disturbance, which I'm about to do now. Do you see?"

She hesitated an infinitesimal second, considering Angela keenly, while Dr. Poole visibly tried for breath and failed. "Are you in love with that beautiful mountain?" she asked, indicating the physician.

"I—I am going to marry him!" Angela said faintly.

"How about his wife? Has she consented?" darted from Mrs. Dare.

"His—wife?" screamed Miss Starr.

"His wife, to be sure—that lady, over there, the one you saw my husband hugging and kissing. That's Mrs. Dr. Poole, although one might not suspect—"

After which Geraldine said no more.

That sudden, awful, ear-splitting shriek of Angela's would have drowned the puffing of a locomotive!

CHAPTER XIII.

LATER COMERS.

DO not underestimate this shriek. It was not a mere loud cry, indicating grief or rage or amazement or a combination of the three. In volume, in penetrating power, in emotional impetus, this shriek was in a class all by itself. It struck terror to the heart and set the skin to crawling, it caused one's hair to rise politely and to stand respectfully before its might. A girl falling from a thousand-foot precipice and hitting a particularly sharp rock might emit a shriek like that, but Angela Starr had accomplished it while sitting on a perfectly comfortable couch.

Nor did she ruin its effect by essaying other shrieks. As the echoes of this one died slowly through the house, Miss Angela devoted a very impressive ten seconds to clasping her hands and staring at Dr. Poole with great, wild eyes. Then:

"*Wife!*" she whispered. "Your *wife!*"

"She—"

"*Is she? Is she? Is she?*" screamed Angela.

"Of course. I would have told you, but that—"

"Oh—oh!" cried the patient.

And then, with a whirl, she had turned about and thrown herself face downward into the pillows. Face buried, her clenched fists beat and beat and beat, while her muffled screams sounded hideously from the feather depths!

"My father! My father! He'll—" came up from them, too.

"I shall do my best to explain to your father," came thinly from Dr. Poole's white lips.

"You can't explain! You can never explain—to father! And I thought—you brought me here—to this place! *To this place!*"

Once more she screamed. The fists beat on and on and on.

It was painful enough for all of them, of course, yet its most pronounced effect

seemed to be upon Geraldine Dare. Much as if tons of ice-water had been poured over her, Geraldine had returned to her sane senses. A stifled gasp, and she had backed away in George's direction, blinked at him and recoiled—and then had ceased recoiling and stared scared bewilderment.

"What's the matter with her, George?" she gasped.

"Just what Poole said would be, I guess!" George chattered. "He must know more about medicine than I thought."

"She hasn't—gone mad?"

"Well, if she's doing all that for fun she must have a queer idea of a joke!" George murmured.

"And I started it!"

"You were warned."

"I know, but who could—who could have thought—"

"Nobody, Gerry!" groaned George.

The fists beat on and on. There seemed to be no end to their beating or to the strength of the arms behind them. George turned away. He could not watch it—not with the knowledge that, but for himself, the unfortunate young woman would be home and in bed at this moment. He turned cold from head to foot. He stole a glance at Dr. Poole.

Rather wild-eyed himself, the physician was going rapidly through his pockets, evidently in search of stray sedatives. They were not lurking in his coat—they were not in his vest—again, they were not in his trousers pockets; and at each failure Dr. Poole's cheeks whitened another shade. He caught George's eye, and flamed suddenly—and George looked away hurriedly and took to watching Miss Woodbury.

Her hands were wringing now. She was walking back and forth, back and forth, up at the end of the room—and now she threw out the hands and now she took to wringing them again. That wonderful assurance which had been so much a part of her a little earlier was all gone now; even the Miss Woodbury who had tried to pull the arms out of Aunt Amanda's best mahogany chair had been a placid person in comparison. Paint and all, one could not but feel sorry for the woman, who was having a struggle all her own.

Then, so far as decision was possible to one so distraught, she seemed to reach it! She sped to Dr. Poole and touched his arm.

"Her—father!" she began.

"What?" gasped the doctor.

"I mean to say, her father—"

"Stop that babbling!" snapped Dr. Poole. "You're making her worse, if that is possible."

He turned his back. Miss Woodbury drew breath and looked about dazedly; and with a queer, stumbling rush she was upon Margery!

"This—girl's father—" she began.

"Don't speak to me!" said Margery.

"I know, but her—"

"I told you not to speak to me!"

Whereupon, Mrs. Poole turned and moved away, and Miss Woodbury, casting about again, gulped audibly and came to Geraldine's side.

"I want to tell *you*—"

"I don't wish to hear it!"

"But I must tell you that her fath—"

There was the doorway of the living-room, just to the right. Geraldine, gathering her narrow skirts about her, stepped through it and stood in the foyer! Miss Woodbury for a moment choked with dreadful, hysterical laughter.

"You—you, George!" she contrived. "This girl's father—"

"Don't tell me about her father!" George snapped. "I'll be well enough acquainted with him before this thing's all settled."

"I don't mean that. Her father—"

It was altogether too much, this thing of being pawed over and mouthed at by one who never should have rented Aunt Amanda's home in the first place. George shook off the detaining hand and stalked after Geraldine. Miss Woodbury smoothed her brow with one limp hand.

"I'll—tell the girl herself!" she stated, and hurried to the couch. "Miss Starr! Your father is—"

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" screamed Miss Starr.

Dr. Poole took the lady's arm quite roughly.

"Go over there and sit down! D'ye hear? Over there and keep your infernal mouth shut!"

He whirled her away from him, so that

the painted lady really reeled for an instant. She caught the arm of a chair and steadied herself. She settled limply in it, then, and suddenly, with a little cry of her own, she buried her decorated countenance in her tinted hands and wept violently.

Out in the foyer, a frightened smile fluttered over George's lips. He glanced back at the room. He glanced at the door.

"Gerry," he said, with surpassing honesty, "I want to go home!"

"Do you, George?" murmured his wife.

"Yes, and I want to go home *now!* There isn't anything we can—I can—do for them, in there."

"There couldn't be, George," Geraldine said, and it did not escape George that her recent great animosity toward him had dwindled astonishingly.

"Listen, Gerry. I'm not fooling!" he said quickly. "Look at it any way you like, we're better out of this house than in it—and they'll be better off, too. If we move fast enough, we can get out before this last explosion quiets down, and I know about where the cars are hidden and the name of the man who has 'em! Come!"

"Isn't it cowardly to run like that when—"

"Honestly, I don't know whether it is or not, but I'm inclined to think that I couldn't do anything kinder than to disappear! And I never felt so much like driving a car as I do at this minute," George whispered. "Let's get out, and—"

Perhaps the wisdom of the thing appealed to Geraldine. It may have been that she was past resisting suggestion, for that dreadful scream of Angela's had shaken Geraldine to the core. At all events, it is a fact that she hurried after George to the door of Aunt Amanda's home. A fearful smile, terror, doubt and elation mingling, split his countenance for a moment. Softly, George turned the knob—and stepped back, and stepped back still further and threw up his hands.

He had timed the opening of that door to the very second! The heavily built, gray-haired man with the hard gray eyes and the raincoat—whether he had materialized from thin air or had just been crossing the veranda, the gray-haired man was on the point of entering just then. More than this, he was no chance traveler; he was a man with a mighty stride and a fixed purpose. One long step took him across the threshold as George faltered:

"That—that—he's the man I pulled the chair away from—he's the man who sat on the floor, Gerry! Gerry! Do you see him, too? Do you—"

The elder man stopped and peered. He also scowled in astonishment.

"Dare?" he muttered. "Dare? What the devil are *you* doing here?"

"I—you see, I—"

"That's confoundedly queer!" the other stated. "Are you mixed up in this affair, too?"

"I—yes, I am mixed up in a way!" George confessed dizzily. "But you don't understand—"

"The fact that you're here tells me enough!" the stranger rapped out, very crisply. "I can't guess the connection offhand, and it isn't necessary. I can deal with *you* in short order!"

"Eh?"

"Oh, yes! I can't conceive how you tangled yourself into my family affairs. It seems incredible that a man can be such an ass, but I presume it's in retaliation for some of the things I said to you to-day when you tried to kill me," pursued the latest arrival, who was plainly the queerest of them all! "All right, then! You didn't know that I'd bought your firm—lock, stock and barrel, did you?"

"No, I—I didn't know that," George said, from a distance.

"Well, I have, and you're fired! Get that? Fired! Now, where's your woman?"

"*My* woman?"

"*The* woman, then!" snarled the gentleman who had just wrecked George's career. "The one who asked me to come to dinner? Jane Woodbury!"

"Dinner—I don't know!" George mumbled. "Miss—er—Woodbury—here she is!"

She had indeed arrived. She was in the living-room doorway now, apparently trying to say something. Tears had done their streaking worst with the artificial layer

upon Miss Woodbury's epidermis; more than anything else, just now, she resembled some strange, new kind of white savage in full war-paint.

And sharp and self-contained as the stranger had been when dealing with George, the painted lady certainly sent a visible shock through him. He emitted one small cry; he thrust his head forward and squinted, as if unable to believe his own eyes.

"You—*you're* not Miss Woodbury?" he gasped.

"I am—Miss Woodbury," barely managed to pass the lady's lips.

"Good—gad!" the gentleman said; and then he laughed, harshly and with infinite scorn. "I've been fooled, have I? What can a woman like *you* possibly know of—" He stopped again and stared at George. "See here, Dare!" he cried. "I—I'm very confused! I—"

It was mere truth, of course. The gentleman stared again at the painted lady and once more at George. One saw that something was beyond his comprehension. He gazed into the dining-room, with its table set for two, and frowned; he turned and stared into the living-room.

"*Poole!*" he shouted.

And on the couch the girl stirred quickly. She sat up. She winked rapidly and incredulously at the stranger in the doorway—and now she had wriggled from the couch and she was dashing to him. She had, in fact, thrown her arms about his neck as she cried:

"Father! Dad! Dad, I—I thought I wanted to marry him! I—don't want to marry him!"

"Marry—Poole?" gasped the stranger.

"Yes! Yes! I thought I did! I don't! I—I loathe him! He has a wife! His wife's standing there, and—"

"Wait!"

"And he never told me, dad! He never even hinted at—at that! He—took me everywhere—he always seemed so wonderful, and—he isn't! He's horrible! He brought me to that woman's house, and—"

"Stop, Angela!" commanded Angela's father, and the quiet in his voice, which should have been soothing in a spot where quiet was so much needed, sent a quick little chill through George.

Miss Starr subsided, gasping. The cold rays from her father's eye settled on Dr. Poole.

"Infatuation!" he breathed. "We spoke of infatuation only this morning, did we not?"

"This isn't—"

"And this is the advantage that you, a man and a physician, have taken of a girl's infatuation," the still, dreadful voice went on. "You brought her *here!*"

"So far as that actual fact is concerned, yes," the doctor said hoarsely.

"You brought my daughter to a house of this character!" Starr repeated, and his hand dropped into the pocket of his raincoat.

"I knew nothing of the character of the place! I—"

The gray rays shot at Miss Woodbury for a terrific instant and then back to Dr. Poole.

"I don't know whether it is accident, Poole, that you should have done this ghastly thing just when I had been summoned here. It may possibly be that. It may be that the girl had been dragged into a horrible plot, with blackmail as its object and that you have had the supreme daring to make me a witness to my own daughter's shame. But I do know that you have brought her to this house, Poole."

"But you can't possibly believe—" the doctor cried.

"And that's enough!" Starr snapped, very grimly. "After seeing the woman of the place, all the words in the world cannot explain away the fact, Poole. Well, you've picked the wrong victim! I grew up where every man was his own law, Poole, and I don't come to mysterious houses unprepared. If you want to pray, pray fast!"

And, impossible though it might be, there whisked from the gentleman's raincoat pocket a pistol—no wicked, refined little automatic affair, but a long, dark, old-fashioned six-shooting messenger of quick destruction! Down its muzzle one could have dropped a hazel nut; upon its hammer Starr's thumb rested lovingly!

Margery was screaming frantically. Angela Starr, pushed aside, was cowering against the wall, and it is to be remembered that Angela had known her father for some years and knew when to cower. The Woodbury person, who was apparently taking the simplest way out by strangling inconspicuously, tugged at her throat and gasped.

And now Margery Poole, her arms around his neck, had thrown herself bodily upon her husband.

"Don't! Don't shoot!" she shrieked. You're wrong—wrong! He's innocent! He never in all his life—"

"Get away, Margery!" Poole panted, as he tore her loose and swung her off at arm's length. "It runs in the family, I suppose, but—stay away, I tell you!"

"I'll never stay away!" Margery cried. "If he shoots you, he'll shoot me, too!"

She struggled vainly—and George Dare came back to life. Geraldine had been entirely wrong in that matter of cowardice; George may have wished to flee, some minutes back, but he did not wish to flee now. The weirdest calm of all his days had come upon George. It was actually happening before his eyes—all of it, and the responsibility for all of it was his own. Poor old Poole stood on the threshold of a better world because of George. Margery was about to become a widow, because of George!

And what did life hold for George himself? His strangely placid brain rushed on, surveying the future. As at the wave of a magic wand, his wonderful job had vanished; that, at the best, meant a new start in life; it meant that the exquisite little apartment would have to go at once, and that they would disappear into a cheap little flat somewhere while George went out and hunted work! And it meant humiliation and suffering, too, for Geraldine—while, with George entirely out of the way, there would be a matter of twenty thousand dollars in insurance to tide over her first grief; and ladies whose husbands have been slain by millionaires in the heat of blind fury have a wonderful prospect of collecting a good many times twenty thousand dollars, later on.

These rather astonishing thoughts shot lucidly through George's mind; they came to their logical conclusion, and George stepped out quickly and thrust himself squarely in front of Dr. Poole.

"It's my fault—all of it!" he snapped. "If anybody has to take that dose, give it to me!"

"Stand where you are and you'll get it!" said Starr, and his small, dangerous smile told in full George's utter unimportance as a moral or a physical bullet-stopping force.

And now Starr had clicked back the hammer with a horrible little "tick" and had sent the hand aloft. And now it was coming down again, swiftly and quite inexorably!

CHAPTER XIV.

CONSEQUENCES.

ANOTHER second, George fancied, and it would be over. He smiled at Geraldine; he noted that Geraldine was struggling hard to move and was still unable to budge one inch from where she stood.

Well, it was a queer, queer finish for a young man whose life had started so well. George shook his head and caught his breath as he gazed into the muzzle of the gun. Then he folded his arms and smiled, for Starr was sighting along the barrel of his artillery.

"Duck, Arthur!" yelled the human sacrifice!

Mr. Starr's thick finger had tightened on the trigger. Mr. Starr, even before this, had passed into the murderer class, and George, of necessity, must be dead—although the very curious thing was that he did not feel dead at all. His steady, blank stare seemed still to be upon that yawning muzzle, and—yes, Starr had not fired after all! Starr, with an odd squint, was listening intently; and now that one came to heed such minor things there was a good deal to be heard, outdoors!

At no great distance, several people seemed to be shouting violently. There were muffled thuds—quick, hard thuds, and more yells. There was a splash, too, and then a laugh and a distant:

"No, he's all right! He's swimming!"

And a fainter voice added:

"I've knocked this one cold!"

"He'll get over it! Come along!" said the first tone.

Steps were running toward Aunt Amanda's home. And they were steps that pounded out salvation for George and for Dr. Poole, too, because they had claimed all of Mr. Starr's flatteringly complete attention for a little. Albeit the hammer remained as it was, the muzzle of his weapon pointed at the floor; if, absently, he chanced to pull the trigger now he would wound nothing more sensitive than a potato barrel or Aunt Amanda's coal pile below!

And it was glorious—even this little respite! George grinned faintly and dizzily and tried to assimilate the things that were passing before him now.

Two young men had whisked into the picture, to be sure! One of them was tall and thin and distinctly handsome, markedly resembling Angela Starr. The other was shorter and heavily built, and had short, reddish hair, which caught one's attention by reason of his bareheadedness. It was the tall one who panted at Starr directly:

"*Dad!* What the deuce—you're here, are you? What kind of a joint is this?"

He of the reddish hair laughed breathlessly.

"Crooks around!" he cried, rather incoherently. "They tried to get our car away when we got out of it! They—they'll need mending before they try it again! Jack kicked one of 'em into the river!"

"Yes, Sorley?" Starr said hoarsely, for it is a confusing thing to be interrupted just when one has all but consummated a necessary murder.

"And Harry put the other one to sleep, and—" began he who was evidently Starr's own son, and there he ceased speaking.

Nor was this because Angela had sped across to the red-haired young person, nor because she threw herself sobbing upon him.

"Harry! Harry! Harry!" she cried. "You'll forgive me, Harry? Won't you forgive me? I—I thought I loved him and I—I was crazy, Harry! I hate him! I loathe him! I love you! Oh, Harry, I do love you! I do! I do!"

"Why, so—so I understood before, kid," murmured young Mr. Sorley, who seemed pleasantly phlegmatic of disposition. "You're going to marry me, aren't you?"

"Yes, and soon! Let's not wait, Harry!" Angela pleaded. "Please let's not wait all that time for the church wedding and everything. Let's—let's be married to-morrow, Harry! I'm not responsible—truly I'm not! I need you to look after me and keep me, and—Harry, will you?"

"So far as I'm concerned, yes!" smiled the red-haired one, and enfolded her in his thick, strong arms. "It sounds to me like a darned good idea. What's the row, Angy? Is it infatuated with the doctor?"

"It thought it was, but it isn't! Oh, Harry, it isn't!" cried Angela, as she snuggled closer to him, and even the most suspicious nerve specialist could not have questioned the sanity of her glowing eyes.

Yet, as has been said, it was not this little scene that so affected young Starr. He seemed wholly unaware of the scene's existence. His dark countenance gone quite black with towering rage and unutterable astonishment, Angela's brother stared at Miss Woodbury alone and, as George observed mistily, that purely virtuous horror which all the rest of them had manifested at the first sight of her was altogether missing. Three successive times did Jack Starr swallow before he was able to explode with:

"*Helen!* What in the name of all that —*what d'ye mean by it?* Have you gone raving crazy? Where are your clothes? Who plastered that rotten paint all over you, and—and—look at those eyebrows!"

His eyes closed tight and opened again. She was there as before, and the veins stood out suddenly on the young man's temples.

"Go wash off that stuff, Helen!" he roared. "Wash it off! And put on some decent clothes!"

"Do you know—that woman, Jack?" his father asked.

"Know her? That's Helen Deston, the girl I'm going to marry!" the younger Starr cried wildly. "That's the girl you've been raising Cain about this last month, father, without ever consenting to see her—just

because she was a business woman and not our—our social equal!" the young man laughed savagely, contemptuously at his parent. "*Our social equal!* As if—"

"Well, is she?"

"Say, you don't suppose she looks like *that* as a rule, do you?" Angela's brother demanded. "I don't know what's happened to Helen to-night, but she's the sweetest, the loveliest, the dearest—"

He ceased again, this time because the alleged Miss Woodbury's arms were about his neck and the vehemence of Miss Starr's emotion, a moment back, was as nothing to the vehemence of Miss Woodbury's emotion now.

"Jack! Jack, dear!" she gasped. "I —I did it for—us!"

"You did what?"

"Planned it all, and it all seemed so clever!" Miss Woodbury wept suddenly, with complete abandon, so that her words were very wet and difficult to distinguish. "I planned it all because he—he hated me —because I was in business, and—and had made a success of it and everything! I wanted to match wits with him and show him that a real advertising agent could beat any—any financier alive, even if she was a woman!

"And it was so clever! It did seem so clever, and the place was so perfect! Why, even the little bridge down there!" gasped the stricken girl, and her tone grew wondering. "I had them close it and put up the sign, so that the men I hired would have lots of room to get away with his car when it came, and make sure that he'd have to stay until I said he could go, and he admitted that he was licked, and that—"

"Stop!" cried the younger Starr. "*Stop!* What's it all about?"

He shook her, too, causing Miss Woodbury to take some control of herself. A heavy sob or two and she drew back.

"I'm—I'm ashamed, but it—it *was* clever!" she choked. "I sent him a note, Jack—this morning. I told him to come here to-night for dinner, and that—that it was possible the matter of his son's marriage to the—the girl he wouldn't meet could be arranged to his satisfaction, and I signed it 'Jane Woodbury.' Oh, it was horrible, I suppose, but he's been so—so horribly nasty about me."

"He has been all of that," said Angela's brother coolly, and glanced at his father. "Go on."

"Well, that's all, of course, except that I meant to—to get him here and be—*like this,*" faltered Aunt Amanda's tenant. "I sent away the cook for to-night, and two friends of mine were coming, although they backed out. And I meant to hide them and —and just serve dinner myself and then sit down with him and—and vamp him, Jack! No, not really—I don't mean that! I mean that I'd have been leaning over the table and blowing cigarette smoke in his face when the other two appeared; and they'd recognize him and call him by name and then—then go! And he'd be here alone with me, and I'd threaten him all sorts of things unless he wrote—wrote Helen Deston—me—a note saying that he had no objection at all to her marrying you, Jack!"

"And after that?" the elder Starr queried, rather interestedly.

Helen Deston glanced at him, and shrank closer to his son.

"After that I—I meant to laugh at you, after I'd locked up the note, and tell you who I really was and that you weren't nearly so clever as you thought, and that even a business girl—" She stopped. She shuddered suddenly and her lips trembled again. The necessity for acting was wholly past and Miss Deston very nearly her natural self again. "Oh, it—it was horrible!" she cried. "I'm so ashamed—I—I—don't know what to say!"

She hid her face against young Mr. Starr's coat. That gentleman stiffened.

"You see what you drove her to!" he informed his parent.

"And that's the girl I called 'some scatter-brained little stenographer,' is it?" his father smiled grimly.

"Yes!"

"Well, she isn't scatter-brained, and she does seem rather devoted to you," the older man muttered, and his smile grew less grim as his keen gaze seemed to wander beneath the paint and penetrate nearer to the real Helen. "What spoiled the pretty little plot, my child?"

"I did!" his son snapped. "She told me not to come up to see her new home before Sunday, but I couldn't—"

"You didn't, though," Miss Deston corrected. "*He* spoiled it all by coming!" She pointed at George Dare. "He brought them all!"

The dark young man looked around. It was really the first time that he had noted the rest of them.

"Why, hello, Poole!" he exclaimed. "Who are the ladies? Who—say, who are *you*, anyway, to ruin things by butting in?" he inquired of George, and stepped nearer.

"Yes, and he ruined Arthur's whole life by it, too!" Margery Poole cried, and also stepped nearer to George.

Her husband was at her side, too, recovering slowly from the recent escape and warming steadily as he regarded George. Angela, who had been whispering, also approached, with young Mr. Sorley. So that George, abruptly, found himself the center of a steadily narrowing circle—Starr and Poole and Margery, and the younger Starr and Helen and Sorley and Angela, and not a solitary friendly eye among them!

Like a hunted animal, he looked around swiftly. Each of them had a score to settle with him, it appeared; and while the danger of actual death had passed, there was that in the several expressions of the male members which hinted at the violently elemental form that settlement might take.

There was the window. He might make a dash for that. He did not seem to mind the glass so much just now. He estimated the distance—and just there Geraldine pushed quickly to his side and thrust a protecting arm about George Dare.

"Now stop! All of you, just stop!" she said sternly. "It isn't George's fault, at all. You just don't understand George!"

"Can anyone do that?" Dr. Poole snapped.

"I can!" Geraldine replied, with a firm little smile. "If you'll just stop all that threatening nonsense, I'll—I'll explain him!"

When dawn appeared, foggy and cheerless, the fourth tablespoonful of powdered mustard and the second kettle of boiling water had at last brought George's footbath to a properly elevated temperature. Things are likely to happen to any man who has topped off a wet-footed evening with two blowout repairs in a driving rainstorm and a side slip into a muddy ditch which necessitates standing in four inches of muddy water while adjusting the jack. Most of them had happened to George. So George tucked the blanket a little more closely around him and moodily considered the yellow dust on the steaming water.

And presently he glanced at Geraldine, sitting over there on the end of the bed—and Geraldine actually smiled at him as she asked gently:

"Hot enough now, Georgie?"

"I'm warming slowly, thanks," George mumbled, humbly. "I—Gerry, I want to beg your pardon. About yesterday afternoon, I mean. I was an ass."

"Oh, that's all right, George," said Geraldine. "Shall I put on another kettle?"

"Don't bother any more with me. I'm not worth it. Gerry!"

"Yes, dear?"

"You talked me straight back into my job, up there. Do you know that?" George inquired, with some awe.

"I knew it at the time, George," Geraldine said dryly.

"You're a wonder, Gerry. I don't deserve you. Only—say, *who* could ever have thought that the thing would turn into a mess like that?" George inquired wonderingly.

"Nobody. You're the only man alive who could start just that kind of muddle," sighed pretty Mrs. Dare.

Followed a long pause, during which the milkman four stories below beguiled the lonely hour by dropping a full case of empty milk bottles to the sidewalk—during which Hannah, who grew restless about dawn, moaned noisily and turned over, somewhere in the rear, bringing a long creak from the springs.

"At that, it was a success, wasn't it?" George asked suddenly, with a wan, pathetic smile. "Before they all left, Poole and his wife were reconciled. That Angela doll and the red-head had it all arranged

to be married right after church to-day. And it was very much all right with young Starr and the other girl. Wasn't she a pippin, with the make-up scrubbed off? And the old man was plumb strong for her, when they got out!" George meditated. "There must be a streak of crook in him; I think he admired the stunt she was going to pull on him. Yes, it was a success at that!"

"Well, I shouldn't call it a success," Geraldine said, rising. "I'll get you another kettle of water, George. I'd just sit there and thank my lucky stars that I'd escaped from my very last effort of the kind—*alive!*"

George's pathetic smile vanished. He sighed heavily, and nodded down at the steam clouds.

"You said something that time, Gerry!" he agreed gloomily.

It may have been the rattle of the teakettle as Geraldine drew some of the reasonably warm fluid from the hot-water faucet, or it may have been the faint pop of the gas as she lighted the largest burner again in the stove. At any rate, Hannah roused, creaked out of bed, and opened her door. She found her mistress busily engaged and singing very softly.

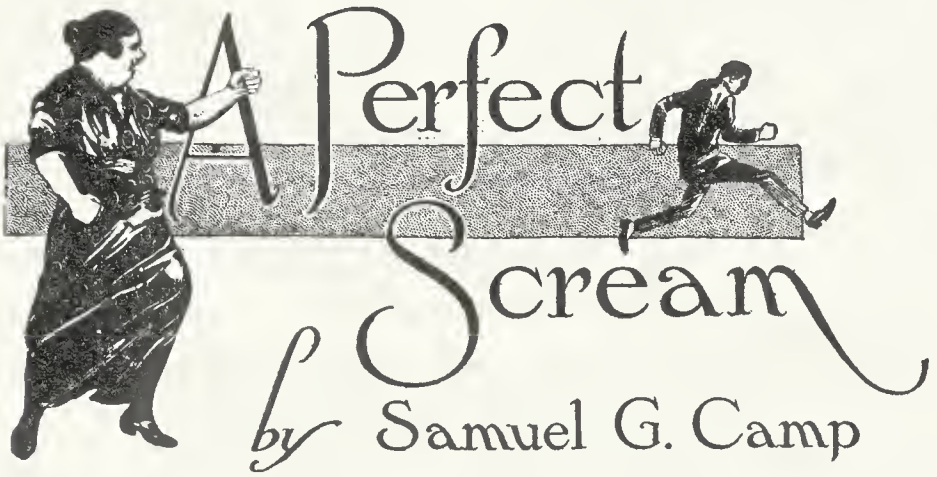
"How come you can sing with a man lak *that?*" Hannah inquired without preface.

Geraldine started and then flashed a smile at her maid. It was a tired smile, yet brilliant and happy; and while, of course, Geraldine was not in the habit of discussing her husband with her maid, she made an exception in this case.

"He isn't like that any more, Hannah," she said serenely. "He's cured now."

She was right about that.

(The End.)



THIS happened quite a long time ago. To be exact, it was when Aleck Wheeler and I first plunged into the theatrical business. Since that time we have been in and out of the theatrical business several times in what is called rotation. There is a fatal fascination about the dramatic industry. It is something like the celebrated "call of the wild." In fact, it is a good deal like it. Anyway, you always want to go back. The third day after the sheriff has dropped round and closed you out finds you figuring on how to crash back in again. Anyhow, that's the way it has been with Aleck Wheeler and I. We have found that there is a great deal of fascination attached to the drama; but if there is anything else attached to it, it is still there for all of Aleck and me.

But at the time I am writing about, Aleck and I were pretty well fixed. We had accumulated quite a large sum of money by various methods, including a modicum of light, pleasant work, and a sixty-to-one shot on an animal named Blue Bells, which was quietly piped off to Aleck

and me as a hot apple, or sure thing, and, strangely enough, proved to be such. Now, for some time Aleck and I had been laying our plans to pry into the show business as soon as the time was ripe, and as soon as we had cashed in on Blue Bells all signs pointed to the fact that the time was sufficiently matured for all practical purposes.

So we immediately bought a play. We bought it from a playwright who could afford that form of amusement because he had a good job writing baseball for a large and responsible evening newspaper. His name was Archibald Jones, and he was perfectly frank. He said that almost every well-known theatrical manager in the world had had an opportunity to buy that play, but none of them had bought it. Instead, they had told him that as a playwright he was a sensationally successful baseball writer. And consequently, if we wanted that play, we could have it at our own price, be it ever so humble, and he would remember us in his prayers for evermore. I suppose by that he intended to indicate gratitude, but it sounded to me as if Archibald had some doubts about what the future held in store for Aleck and me—in case we bought the play, of course.

Nevertheless, we bought it; and at a price that I am ashamed to mention. You see, in reading the play over, Aleck and I had discovered something that had evidently escaped those other well-known impresarios, provided they had ever read the play, which is doubtful. Mr. Jones had called his play "A Scream at Midnight," from which any one at all versed in matters of the sort will at once conclude that it was nothing to laugh at—presumably, at any rate. No, it was not a comedy; it was a tragedy; a regular good, old-fashioned melodrama, except in one particular: owing to the fact that the *locale* of the story was laid in a certain large, wicked, Atlantic seaport, it had unfortunately been impossible for Mr. Jones to mortgage the farm. But if there was any other ancient and rheumatic melodramatic device which Mr. Jones had neglected to make use of, Aleck and I couldn't recall it. There was even a sawmill.

But hidden away in Archibald's bunch of gleanings from the history of the melodrama, Aleck and I found it—the punch! We found it lurking in scene two of act one, in a short paragraph of stage directions. There were a good many erasures and several irritating smudges in the paragraph, but after I had decoded it and read my translation out loud to Aleck, I asked him:

"Seriously, Aleck, what do you know about that?"

"Man," said Aleck, "it's a knockout!"

"In my opinion, Aleck," said I, "you just now remarked one heaping teaspoonful. It's a thriller!"

"It 'll knock 'em dead!" prophesied Aleck. "Take this straight from me, Andy: you could write just that one wallop into one of the President's messages, put it on the boards, and clean up a million! The rest of the play doesn't make any difference at all. Not a bit. Any customer that ain't fully satisfied after a slam like that can have his money cheerfully refunded to him upon application at the box-office."

"I don't know that I'd go quite that far," said I. "It pays to be conservative in matters of that kind. But I agree with you, Aleck—it makes the play. And what's more, it isn't one of those delayed punches; it comes early in the game, which is no doubt a fortunate thing for us, because probably there will still be quite a large number of people out in front. Anyhow, it's a whale of a punch, eh, Aleck?"

"I'll say it is," said Aleck.

After acquiring from Mr. Jones all the different kinds of rights there were to "A Scream at Midnight," Aleck and I hired a hall to rehearse in, and a man who knew all about routing shows, and a number of people who freely admitted that they were actors and actresses, and a scene painter, and so forth, and got down to business.

The cast called for three women and four men. Inasmuch as one of the male characters passed away violently early in act one, it seemed to Aleck and me that this chap ought to be willing to work for us pretty cheap, not having anything particular to do for the remainder of the evening. However, he called our earnest attention to

the fact that one of the most difficult things in the art of acting is to play dead in such a manner that it carries conviction to the customers; and so if Aleck and I thought the part was a sinecure, believe him, we had another guess coming. He also informed us that he was famed far and wide as one of the most successful delineators of corpses in the profession, and he positively guaranteed satisfaction. But as for working at anything less than union rates, nothing stirring. We could suit ourselves—take him or leave him. So after talking it over, we took him. We figured that if he was as good at playing dead ones as he claimed to be, he would no doubt be worth the money. We wanted the corpse to carry all the conviction possible, because it was an important factor in the big scene. His name was Aloysius McFadden.

The leading male part called for a juvenile, and we missed getting one by about ten years. As that is about the usual margin by which managers miss getting juveniles, we didn't worry. It strikes me that juveniling is a mighty unhealthy occupation; at any rate, it seems to be a fact that all juveniles die young, regardless of whether they're good or bad, and also regardless of age. The lady who took the leading female part was also afflicted with a slight impediment in her age. I think that must have been what ailed her anyway, because I know Aleck and I were a good deal surprised when she showed up in answer to our advertisement—inasmuch as the advertisement had explicitly stated that for this part we required somebody of fairly recent origin; somebody that could romp gracefully all over the stage, and shake her lovely golden locks, and be gay and pert and soubrettish without all the time worrying about cracking her enamel or something, or putting too much weight on the leg that had the rheumatism in it, or, possibly, falling all apart in a sort of loose heap and having to be scraped up by the stage-hands.

That was what we wanted; but instead of that we got a vintage dame whose first stage appearance, I think, may well have been in the Follies of 1876, or thereabouts. However, she was a past—quite a while past—mistress of the art of turning back time in its flight by means of things that she took out of a large japanned tin box and used freely where they would do the most good. In fact, she was so good at it that you couldn't mention a single ravage that stood any show with her at all. Before each and every performance she accomplished a miracle of rejuvenation that —well, that's what it was, a miracle. And so she might have been worse; not much, but some.

You understand, what with one thing and another, including the movies, it was impossible for Aleck and me to be pickers and choosers to any great extent; we had to take what we could get and be thankful or otherwise as the case might be. It was generally otherwise. The villain, for instance. I have always been partial to lean, dark-complexioned villains with romantic, high-sounding names; but we were forced to put up with a fat, florid party whose monniker was George Higgins. However, I'm not finding any fault with George; I've seen a good many villains that were quite plainly a lot more harmless than George; furthermore, George came to the aid of his party—meaning Aleck and me—at a time when we certainly needed a friend; and if there was a jinx on George's efforts in our behalf, it wasn't George's fault.

No, on the whole, the company wasn't so bad. To be sure, any one sitting nearer than row H might have had cause to suspect in a sneaking sort of way that one or two members of the cast were not all they appeared to be; but, all in all, the cast was fairly satisfactory—to one not too critical.

By the time the scenic effects were ready, the ladies and gentlemen of the company were fairly well up in their lines, notably the gent who went West early in act one; and so we advanced in close formation on a near-by town to try "A Scream at Midnight" on the dog. We were booked to play there two nights, Tuesday and Wednesday, and we had arranged for the use of the theater Monday and Tuesday for dress rehearsals and the necessary final polishing up.

Thus it came about that on Monday night Aleck and I had our first opportunity

of seeing how the terrific wallop that we had discovered in Mr. Jones's play would pan out under actual working conditions. In the very nature of things, how the big scene would really shape up was something that we'd had no means of finding out before; but we didn't need to find out; we knew already; it was sure-fire! Still, there was one trifling phase of the subject into which Aleck and I might have looked very easily, and I've never been able to figure out why we didn't. Anyhow, before that particular Monday evening was over we certainly wished that we had looked into it —searchingly.

Before going on to reveal the nature of the big scene which I have mentioned several times, I wish to state emphatically that Aleck Wheeler and I still cling to all dramatic and other rights in same, and infringers will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law and made to like it. With that understanding, the scene that Aleck and I confidently relied upon to make a couple of young fortunes for us was very much as follows.

Stage and auditorium are dark; and by that I mean pitch black. All lights out. Presently a pale white circle of light appears, flickering here and there—on the stage, of course. Not a sound. It is plainly the light cast by an electric torch. The light picks up some unimportant object, holds it momentarily, and passes on. This continues for some moments. Silence. Suspense. A clock starts striking the hour of midnight. The strokes are deliberate and remorseless; also they sound hollow and weird and ghostly. Note: it took Aleck and me two days to find that clock, and even then it didn't have just exactly the sort of melancholy note we were looking for.

The clock continues striking. The pale white circle of light halts, moves away, and again comes to rest. Then, on the stroke of twelve, the light shines full upon the face of the dead man. He is sitting at the library table almost as he had been sitting when the treacherous hand of George Higgins delivered the fatal blow. Centered in the circlet of light his face is ghastly. But suddenly it is blotted out. There is the scream—the high-pitched, nerve-racking, horror-stricken scream of a woman suddenly rendered one hundred per cent distracted. Then—a fall. She has fainted. Again silence. Oh, boy!

Whereupon the lights come on again, showing the so-called juvenile with his hand still upon the electric switch and evincing considerable consternation about something, the leading lady in a dead faint, and the victim of George Higgins's fell work still "holding it." And the play proceeds.

That was the big smash, and I think you'll agree with Aleck and me that it was calculated to make most anybody sit up and take notice. And no doubt you've noted that the so-called effects were all purely mechanical in a way—except the scream.

As for the scream—it had to be good. No, there wasn't, and must not be anything purely mechanical about that scream. It formed the climax of the whole situation, and it had to be a really natural and spontaneous expression of horror that would send chills scampering up and down the customer's spinal columns and make 'em freeze to the arms of their chairs and gasp for air. If it wasn't that kind of a scream we'd run into a regular anti-climax —the scene would collapse with a feeble report like a punctured toy balloon—and Aleck and I would lose money.

So, considering the importance of that scream, it's kind of funny that Aleck and I hadn't thought of rehearsing it. I think we must have figured that a scream is a sort of primitive noise, and most anybody could produce a satisfactory article. Probably that was it.

At any rate, the success or non-success of "A Scream at Midnight," though somehow Aleck and I had failed to realize it, depended to a pretty large extent, if not entirely, on the screaming abilities of Miss Anita Raymond, the veteran soubrette—our leading lady.

And at that Monday night rehearsal, when we reached the dark scene, Aleck and I went out and sat down in front in order to get the full effect.

"All right," barked Aleck. "Let 'er go!"

The house went dark. Presently the little white moon cast by the electric torch in the hand of Miss Raymond began playing here and there about the stage. It picked up some unimportant object, held it for a moment, and passed on; picked up something else equally unimportant, held that for a second, and moved away. Darkness. Silence. Suspense!

"Great!" whispered Aleck, so as not to break the spell. "Will that get 'em, Andy? Tell me!"

"You bet it will!" I assured him, also in a whisper.

The clock began striking. One—two—three—and, honest, I began to feel 'em—those shivery feelings up and down the back seam of my coat! Ten—eleven—twelve! Positively on schedule time the spotlight illumined the ghastly countenance of Aloysius McFadden, George Higgins's victim.

"I guess that fellow's going to be worth the money," observed Aleck in a hushed tone. "He can certainly play dead!"

"That's what he can," I agreed. "He can surely imitate a corpse to perfection. Honest, he's so darned realistic I feel like sending for an undertaker, or the coroner, or somebody. He certainly makes a dandy dead man!"

Then—the scream at midnight!

And—

"Lights!" yelled Aleck.

They came on.

"Say," said Aleck, addressing Miss Anita Raymond, the expert exterior decorator, in a very rough, coarse tone of voice—"Say, listen! Were you screaming then or taking something for your voice? Were you screaming or gargling your throat? Is that what you call a scream? A healthy scream that was! If that's the way you scream when you suddenly discover that somebody has murdered your father, what would you do if you saw a mouse? Listen! That wasn't a scream. It was only a little yelp—like as if you had stepped on a tack in the dark, or something. You discover that somebody has murdered your father—his face leaps at you right out of the dark—and you make a noise like somebody stepping on a tack! That's what you do, and—rotten! Rotten! Try it again, and this time give me a real scream! Go back to where you throw the spot on your father's face. Never mind the clock. And this time—*scream!* Lights out!"

This time Miss Raymond managed to utter something that was a little more like the real article; but, still, at best, the resemblance was pretty faint.

Once more Aleck called for the lights.

"Now see here," said Aleck, striding down to the footlights and waving his arms excitedly. "What's the idea? Are you going to crab the show? Listen! This is the big scene, and that scream that I'm trying to get out of you is the biggest thing in it. If you don't loosen up and scream the way you ought to, this show is going to be a flivver, and you're going to lose your job. It all depends on you! Get into the situation! Lose yourself! your father has been murdered—murdered in cold blood! You've heard the shot. You're looking round to find out what's happened. And you find him—your father—dead! And then you scream—get me? You *scream!* You don't make a noise that sounds like it was intended to express polite regrets over the occurrence. You're overcome with horror, and the scream shows it! Now that last one was a little better, but not enough—far from it! Try again!"

Well, in a nutshell, Miss Raymond tried again, and again; and she kept on trying until Aleck was a raving maniac, and the rest of us were so nervous that it was all we could do to keep from doing a little shrieking ourselves. Anyhow, I felt as if I could produce a really superior article in that line. And I saw that it wasn't any use. Miss Anita Raymond simply couldn't rise to the occasion. As an emotional actress she was missing; she was simply not there. She didn't have one good healthy scream in her system; or if she did she couldn't get it out.

"Better call it off, Aleck," I said. "It's no use. She can't scream for sour apples, and you might as well make up your mind to it. And besides—listen. I've got a suggestion to make. Maybe one of the other girls may turn out to be a good screamer, and, if so, where would be the objection?

She could go on with Miss Raymond in the dark scene, pull the scream at the proper time, and then get off stage before the lights come on—and no one would be the wiser. Maybe she could simply scream from the wings; though it's my experience that audiences have a pretty good sense of direction, and probably the other way would be best. What do you think?"

After Aleck had partially recovered from the fit of passion he had worked himself into over Miss Raymond's wholly successful failure to come through as a screamer, he thought maybe there might be something in that scheme of mine.

"We've got to do something," said he, "and I suppose we might as well try it; but I'll tell you right now I ain't banking on it at all. I thought most anybody could scream, but it seems I was wrong. And I've lost confidence. I've got a hunch right now that neither one of these other females can scream any better than that cold-storage chicken we just now tried out, but we'll put 'em through their paces and see."

We saw; or maybe I'd better say we heard. And our verdict was that one of 'em sounded like a dying elephant, and the other made a noise like a rear brake that needed oiling. And all efforts to improve on their first attempts went for naught.

"Well," said Aleck, wiping his fevered brow and dropping dejectedly into an orchestra chair, "I guess that settles it. And say! Ain't this hell, though? Wouldn't it kill you? Here we've got a knockout punch that ought to be worth a million dollars, and it ain't worth a cent because we can't find a simple little thing like a good screamer! That's what I call tough."

"It certainly is," said I. "But listen, Aleck. Let's talk with George Higgins and see if he can't help us out. You know George is a regular old-time trouper, and he knows everybody in the profession, and maybe he can think of somebody that we can get a hold of to pull that scream for us to-morrow night, anyway, and after that we'll see."

Aleck said that was a first-rate idea, and he began to look more cheerful right away. We hadn't noticed George around for some time—he wasn't in the wings with the rest of the company—and so Aleck ordered the so-called juvenile to go find him. Of course you remember that George was our heavy villain. The last time George was weighed he totaled up a mere two hundred and ninety pounds, he told us, and since then he hadn't dared look a set of scales in the face. But he didn't think he'd gained much; not more than fifteen or twenty pounds, anyway.

It was some minutes before George showed up; long enough for Aleck to get pretty well irritated up at him.

"Say," demanded Aleck when George finally reported, "where you been? Wasn't it distinctly understood that the entire company was to be present at this rehearsal?"

"Sure," said George. "But—well, I'll tell you: I saw a chance to make a little money, and I took it."

"The chance or the money?" I asked him.

"The dough," said George. And he fished quite a sizable little roll of bills out of his pocket and flashed it at us.

"What did you do with the body?" I asked him.

"Nothing like that," said George. "Here's the way I got it."

He fished a pair of dice out of his vest-pocket and rattled 'em round in the palm of his hand—and you could see that he was dying to "shoot." "Maybe you don't know," said he, "that I'm the champion African golfer of the entire theatrical profession."

"I didn't," I said. "But I knew there was something the matter with you, and no doubt that's it. I'll admit freely that, as a villain, you're a champion crap-shooter, and you don't need to prove it. Who did you take that money away from, and how much of it is there?"

"There's forty-three dollars of it," said George. "I took it away from a bird by the name of Casey, and it was all he had."

"Who's Casey?" I inquired.

"A fellow that works here in the theater," said George. "I've been here all the time, but I couldn't stand all that screaming, and so I went looking for a little amusement, and found it—and a small profit, too."

"Well," said Aleck, "here's something for you to remember: I didn't hire you to shoot craps; it wasn't mentioned in the contract at all. I hired you to act like a villain, or as near like one as it's possible for a big, fat, baby-faced tramp like you to act, and after this I want to have you stick around when there's any acting going on. You might learn something to your advantage. But just now I want some advice from you."

So then Aleck asked George if, for the love of Mike, he knew of any female member of the profession who was a good, free, easy-working, convincing screamer; and if he did know of any such person, would it be possible to get her here in time for the opening performance to-morrow night? He told George that the fact of the matter was that we had to dig up a big-league screamer from somewhere, and do it in a hurry, too, or the jig was up. And how about it? Did George know of any such person?

"Do I?" said George. "I certainly do! You've come to headquarters. I know just the person you want, easy to get at, and everything. And what's more, I'll guarantee something: I'll guarantee that you'll get the real thing—a perfect scream!"

Aleck uttered a large sigh of relief, and I did likewise.

"George," said Aleck, "just for that I'm strongly tempted to raise your salary; but I won't do it, because no doubt you'd squander the money on what you call African golf, and so I'll keep it and spend it wisely myself. Who is she, and where does she reside?"

"Her name," said George, "is Ethel May Darling, and she lives in New York."

"Ethel May Darling, eh," said Aleck. "Never heard of her. What do you know about her?"

"I know this," said George with assurance. "Ethel May Darling would 'a' been one of the greatest emotional actresses this country ever saw if it hadn't been for tapioca pudding and ice-cream. But Ethel got addicted to those things, and after a while she had to retire from the boards because they wouldn't hold her up any longer—or wider. When she retired from the stage she weighed more than I do, and it interfered with her effectiveness. When Ethel was working good it was too much like being right next door to an earthquake, and the audience didn't enjoy it; they felt nervous and distraught. And so Ethel retired. It was a terrible blow to Ethel—to give up her career like that—but she had to; public safety demanded it, and so did the manager she was working for.

"Some time later," continued George, "I remember hearing where Ethel had tried to drown her sorrows in marriage, but the drowning wasn't a success. I forget who he was, but, anyhow, the operation was a failure. And so now Ethel is living alone in a third-class actors' boarding-house in New York on beans and memories, and you can get her for ten dollars and expenses. She'll jump at the chance; or she would if —well, you know what I mean. And I'll say this: Ethel May Darling will deliver the goods. As I said, only her habits prevented Ethel May from being one of the greatest emotional actresses in history, and she'll pull a scream for you that 'd make the hair on a brass monkey stand right straight up on end. But get this: if you hire her, don't forget that like all the rest of these professional emoters, Ethel is shot full of this so-called temperament, and you'll have to handle her with gloves."

"We'll take a chance on that," said Aleck. "Gloves, eh? Why not a derrick? What's the address?"

George gave Aleck the address, and Aleck fished a telegraph blank out of his pocket and wrote a telegram to Ethel May Darling and handed it to George.

"Have the kindness to get that on the wire for me right away, will you, George?" asked Aleck. "And listen," he went on. "We're pretty near through for to-night, and you've certainly done me a favor, and so you needn't come back to the theater. If I were you I'd run right along to the hotel and get a nice long night's rest. We've got a hard day ahead of us, and a hard night; no doubt a good sleep will improve your work, and that's what it needs, improvement."

"All right," said George. "I'll do that." And he left us.

"Well," said Aleck, "that settles that."

"Yes," I said. "And I guess we'll have to hand it to George. He helped us out of a bad hole, sure."

"He certainly did," said Aleck.

But when it came noon next day and nothing had been heard from Ethel May Darling—of course Aleck had asked her to wire reply—Aleck and I began to feel our troubles returning. Two o'clock came, and still no word from Ethel. Three o'clock, and Ethel May continued to maintain the silence of the grave. And Aleck and I were beginning to show our age around the temples. Ten minutes more and we'd 'a' cracked under the strain; but shortly after four it came—the message from Ethel May. Reading from left to right, it was as follows:

Aleck Wheeler,
Adelphi Theatre,
New City,
Conn.
Arrive New City seven-forty-five. Have taxi at station.

ETHEL MAY DARLING.

"Andy," said Aleck, "I know now how it feels when you've killed somebody, and they're going to execute you for it, and then, at the last moment, you get a reprieve."

I felt the same way myself.

During the time Aleck Wheeler and I have been mingling in the theatrical game we've made a good many different kinds of mistakes, but there's one mistake we've never made yet: we've never scrimped on advertising. And we'd taken a lot of pains to arouse public interest in "A Scream at Midnight." We'd papered the town until you couldn't look in any direction without seeing one or more bills announcing Archibald Jones's great drama, "A Scream at Midnight"—presented by Wheeler and Bowman—and so forth. The lithographic work was in a number of different colors, each of which was calculated to put your eye out at forty paces; and the scenes portrayed were certainly exciting enough to suit most anybody. In comparison with our artistic efforts the average movie-thriller bill would—and did—look pale and uninteresting.

Consequently on the opening night of "A Scream at Midnight," we packed 'em in.

"This is what I call doing business—what?" Aleck said to me shortly before the rise of the curtain.

"Doing business is right," I said with enthusiasm. "It's a fine, large audience. Of course, maybe it ain't just exactly what you might call noted for culture and refinement, and I've looked 'em over and counted no dress-suits; but they've paid in their good money, and that's what counts. We're off to a great start!"

Ethel May Darling had joined us shortly after eight o'clock. We had sent George Higgins to meet her. When Ethel May arrived at the theater she was having some trouble with her breathing, and appeared to be considerably shaken up by the journey. George had done no exaggerating whatsoever: Ethel May Darling was a very large woman. She requested to be shown at once to a dressing-room, and gave instructions not to call her until the last minute—just before it was time for her to go on. She said she needed rest, and she looked it. On the way from the station, George had told her as much of the scenario as she needed to know, she said. She said that she knew her duty consisted in uttering one perfect scream of horror when Miss Raymond threw the spotlight on the face of the dead man sitting at the library table, and then getting off stage as rapidly as possible before the lights came on. She knew all that, and now would we please go away and let her alone, as she wanted to relax.

So George and I went away and left her there in the dressing-room. It was a small room, and we knew she'd need all the room there was when she started to relax. Aleck wasn't on the reception committee; he was too busy elsewhere and otherwise.

Scene one of act one passed off smoothly—and several customers passed out quietly. But only a mere handful. Then came the big smash: the dark scene.

"Here's where we get 'em!" prophesied Aleck.

We were standing in the wings.

"Surest thing you know, Aleck," said I. "At this point we knock 'em dead."

Aleck and I had taken particular pains

to make sure that the entire house should be pitch dark, and it was. Ethel May was a bit late in reporting when called, and had scarcely reached her proper position on the stage when the house went dark and the curtain went up.

Business with the electric flashlight—Miss Raymond.

"Feel it?" whispered Aleck, "It's getting 'em!".

And it was, too. There wasn't a sound. The customers were spellbound. The clock began striking. One—two—three. At the first stroke a startled movement passed over the audience. Everybody jumped. They were that worked up. It was going big!

Ten—eleven—*twelve!* On the stroke the white circle of light from the electric torch brought the ghastly face of Aloysius McFadden, the celebrated delineator of deceased persons, into sudden, startling relief against the surrounding darkness. There was a concerted gasp from the customers. There was also a gasp on the stage, and it sounded to me as if it emanated from Ethel May Darling. Then came a scream.

And of its kind it was perfect; but it seemed to me that, as screams go, it was the wrong kind. At any rate, I'll say this: to my right and left ears, both of which are fairly cultivated, that scream didn't sound a bit like a scream of horror. No, it sounded more like the battle-cry of an Amazon going into action—and then came a series of noises which indicated as plainly as need be to me that Ethel May Darling was wiping up the floor of our especially constructed library set with the form of Aloysius McFadden. And whether she was doing any serious damage or not to Aloysius McFadden, I knew not and cared the same; but from the sounds it was a cinch that she was seriously injuring a large number of valuable theatrical properties for which Aleck and I had spent our good money. You could hear Aloysius bump up against one property after another, and none of them seemed able to withstand him. He crashed right through regardless.

Meantime, Ethel May Darling gave piercing tongue to a series of remarks the gist of which was that Aloysius McFadden was several sorts of very low wretches, and maybe he'd thought that he could get away with it, but, if so, Aloysius had another guess coming to him, because now Ethel May had got him, and got him good—and she was going to hang on to him. Aleck and I and the audience also grasped the fact that at some time in the past Aloysius McFadden had allowed himself to be bound in matrimony to Ethel May Darling, and had then left her hurriedly, taking with him a considerable sum of money rightfully belonging to Ethel May, and, on the whole, Ethel May was considerably cut up about it. But Providence—personally I think it was George Higgins—had now delivered Aloysius into Ethel May's hands, and take it straight from Ethel, she was going to see to it personally that Aloysius paid the penalty! And so forth.

Of course it all happened in less time than it takes to tell it; but it happened, and before Aleck could collect himself together and yell for the curtain. And when he did demand the curtain in a loud voice filled with anger and other things, instead of turning on the curtain some simple-minded stage mechanic turned on the lights—showing a large, heaving woman standing amidst the wreck of our library set, and a rear view of Aloysius McFadden going rapidly away from there. And I think Aloysius continued to travel at a very fair rate of speed for some weeks. It was the only common-sense thing to do.

Then came the curtain; and as they say in vaudeville, "A Scream at Midnight" opened and closed in one—and a fraction. Aleck made a little speech regretting many things, among others that it was impossible to continue the performance on account of the absence of Mr. Aloysius McFadden, one of our principal actors, who had been suddenly called away on business of much moment; and as the audience passed more or less quietly out, only a few paused at the box-office. No doubt they were a bit confused in their minds as to just what had happened; but, whatever it was, it was enough. They were satisfied.

A couple of hours after the close of the opening of Mr. Archibald Jones's melodrama, Aleck and I were talking it over at the hotel. We'd already said most of the

things that needed saying, and said them in proper shape, too. And now we'd sort of calmed off and were prepared to make the best of a bad business. You might say that 'Aleck and I were holding a sort of gently sorrowful post-mortem, or something like that.

"I'll tell you what it comes down to, 'Aleck," said I. "Barring that in some way 'Aloysius failed to hear that Ethel May Darling was going to join out with us, and which wasn't so strange on account of you and I and George keeping it pretty well to ourselves on account of not wanting to give the public a chance to learn what was coming off, and you know actors will talk—barring that, it comes right down to this: if Ethel May had reached us in time to meet the rest of the company, including 'Aloysius, before the performance, it never would have happened—not on the stage of the Adelphi, anyway."

"That's right," said Aleck. "And I've been thinking."

We were sitting in the hotel lobby, and just then George Higgins happened to be passing near us.

"Oh, George," Aleck hailed him. "Come here a minute."

George came.

"George," said Aleck, "I've asked you several times to-day if you sent that telegram like I asked you, and every time you've said you did. Now I ask you once more: *when* did you send that telegram? Miss Darling says she didn't get it until after two o'clock this afternoon. Come through!"

"Well," said George, "I guess maybe I might just as well tell the truth for once. On my way out of the theater last night I met that fellow Casey, the one I took the forty-three dollars away from. He said he'd borrowed twenty more and wanted his revenge. He said he knew a handy place near the theater where we could roll the bones, and I knew it would only take me a few minutes to take that twenty away from him, and so I went with him.

"Well, I'll say he kind of surprised me—and I surprised him. It was two o'clock this morning when I finally nicked him for the last of that twenty, and by that time I'd forgotten all about the telegram. I went back to the hotel, hit the hay—and slept over. An hour or so after breakfast I remembered the telegram and sent it. Must 'a' been along toward eleven then, I guess. But what's the difference? She got here, didn't she?"

"I seem to remember that she did," said 'Aleck.

So, when I said that it wasn't George's fault if there was a jinx on his efforts on behalf of Aleck and me, no doubt I should have added some of those things that they add to peace treaties and the like—reservations.

A WINTER SONG

WINTER, and splinter of leaf-barren bough;
Never a thrush with its lyrical vow;
Down in the garden-close everything sere;
Oh, for the rose and the prime of the year!

Eery and dreary the night and the noon;
Gone all the glamour that girdled the moon;
Gone all the glows from the mead and the mere;
Oh, for the rose and the prime of the year!

Whirling and swirling of ominous cloud;
Waves in a welter and earth in a shroud;
Yet through the snows, love, the dawn will break clear;
Oh, for the rose and the prime of the year!

Clinton Scollard.

Watching Steps

by

Albert Edward Ullman

"HERE!" ordered the man in the taxi. Alighting, he handed the driver a crisp bill.

"Sorry I ain't got no umbrelly, boss," croaked the driver as he peered through the drizzle. "I thought it was through raining a couple hours ago."

With a grunt his passenger waved back the change and ran lightly up the steps of one of a somber row of brownstone houses that marked a block in the West Seventies. For a moment he stood there, rummaging through his pockets; then he impatiently pushed the bell-button. After an interval of waiting he pushed it again. A muttered exclamation escaped him as the door opened, revealing a sleepy-eyed man servant in the dim light from the hallway.

Though his evening dress was disarrayed and his face flushed, the man's voice was as steady as his gaze.

"You sleep like a swine," he tersely remarked. "And that means you've been at my claret again."

"I beg your pardon, sir! I—"

"Cut it!" was the retort. "You can have your walking-papers to-morrow."

"If you please, sir; if I may—"

"You may retire," came the curt rejoinder. "I shall not need your services to-night."

"May I be so bold—" started the other, and then faltered, for his employer had turned shortly and fixed him with a look that drove the blood from his trembling lips. He shivered slightly and indulged in a doleful shake of his head as the gray-haired man mounted the stairway.

"I never see 'im this way afore," he muttered to himself. "Such a case o' nerves 'e 'as!"

The slamming of a door came to him as he followed in the other's wake.

Within the commodious bedroom the master jerkily tore off his clothes, tossing the garments on a chaise longue at the foot of the bed. Then, kicking off his shoes, he stepped into the bath-room to turn on the flow of hot water. A few minutes later he lowered himself into the porcelain tub and lay back with a grunt of satisfaction.

The bath seemed to soothe him, bring a grim smile to his face. As he stood there vigorously rubbing himself down, his long, round muscles moved and played under the ministrations of the coarse towel. Though well in his forties, his figure was that of a trained athlete. "As hard as nails," would have best described it, though there was something pantherlike about it.

He was calm now, yet sleepless, as he reentered the sleeping chamber and flung

himself into an easy chair. On the table at his elbow were Turkish cigarettes and the latest mystery novel. He lighted one of the cigarettes, inhaled it luxuriously, and then picked up the book. He liked mystery stores; they eased his tired brain. And, judging by the "blurb" on the printed jacket, this one held some promise.

For some time he read with an interest that was flattering to the new author. Then his eye wandered and he idly turned the pages and read again. At the end of a short interval he turned to the end of the story. "Bah!" he muttered to himself. "I could write a better one myself." He laid the volume back on the table and his hand encountered an evening paper.

First he scanned the financial page; then the sporting columns. After which he turned back to the front page. He ran over the various headings until his eye encountered one that commanded his attention:

BANK ROBBERS' TRUST TRAPPED

Three of "Big Four" Landed by Detective Sergeant Boody

Only "Gray Fox" Escapes Net

Here was a crime story that caused his blood to tingle, caused him to sit up and take notice. Though he had already read a shorter version of it in another paper, it gripped him to the very last line of the column-long article.

Briefly, it was a thrilling narrative of the depredations of a quartette of master crooks. They specialized in bank burglary, but their methods and means were such as to place them far above the ordinary yeggman.

Using New York as a headquarters, they had pivoted out to various cities until the list of looted institutions read like the report of some comptroller of the currency. Not once had they been apprehended. Not once had the finger of the law pointed to them until the daring Boody, with a faint clue as a start, had taken up the scent.

Then followed, in the reporter's best style, a description of the rounding up and final capture of three members of the band. Papers and bank-books taken from the prisoners, the story went on to say, showed that they had large funds at their disposal. While the "Gray Fox," as he had come to be called, had escaped, Detective-Sergeant Boody was confident that the head of the "Big Four" would soon be occupying the cell awaiting him alongside those of his satellites.

As he finished its perusal the man tossed the paper aside and closed his eyes wearily. A little later he prepared for bed, flicked the light out, and threw himself back on the pillows with a grunt. For a time he lay there, his eyes open, his brain still active; then he fell into a troubled doze that brought mutterings from him now and then.

He awoke once with a start and then fell into a deeper sleep. Even from this he started up after a while. It was as if some sixth sense had warned him of danger, something lurking in the dark. Noiselessly he sat upright and bent his head toward the door of the chamber. As he did so a slight draft brushed his face. The door was open.

Calmly he arose, reached for his dressing-gown on the foot of the bed, and wrapped himself in its folds. His hand was steady as he groped for an automatic in the drawer of the little table and his step likewise as he made his way to the door.

For a moment he stood there, listening intently. A slight noise sounded, then sounded again. It was the creaking of the steps. An intruder was in the house, had been in that very room, or, at least the doorway—yet the householder did not hesitate. His footfalls cushioned by the felt slippers he had slipped his feet into, he moved like a shadow in the direction of the stairway. Under his weight there was no creaking as he descended. One foot was firmly planted on the part of the step nearest the wall before another step was taken, for there the timbers were held more firmly and did not give.

As he reached the lower hallway the noise of a chair scraping on a polished floor broke the stillness; then the jarring of some heavier article of furniture. That could only come from the dining-room, the householder knew, and he moved swiftly and silently in that direction. For an instant he

stood in the dark frame of the doorway, immobile, waiting. It was evident that his nerves were of iron.

Now silhouetted against the night-glow reflected through the dining-room window he saw a moving object. One hand shot out and pressed a button; the other brought the automatic on a line with the window. In the flash of lights which followed he beheld a slim figure start back from the open window, a startled, white face turned toward him.

Momentarily he surveyed the burglar. Then his lips curled as he thrust the revolver into the pocket of his dressing-gown.

"Come over here!" he calmly commanded. "And let me get a look at you."

There came a gasp from the intruder; under the compelling gaze of the householder he moved into the circle of light.

"An amateur, eh?" sneered his captor as he surveyed the drenched, woe-begone figure. Then his eye traveled to a bundle the young housebreaker—he was evidently still in his twenties—had half-concealed behind his shrinking figure. "What have you got there?" he demanded fiercely.

For answer the culprit brought the bundle into view. As he did so it unrolled from his shaking hand and dropped to the floor. It was the evening clothes the man had so hurriedly discarded some hours earlier, even to the crumpled piqué shirt in which the studs now glistened.

"Here! Hand me those!" commanded the owner. With another frightened look the intruder passed them over.

"You're a fine crook?" jeered the man as he removed a watch from a waistcoat pocket and a leather wallet from the dinner coat. "Why didn't you take the stuff out of the clothes?"

"I—I—" attempted the youth; then his voice died away.

The householder laughed harshly.

"For all you knew," he said with a sardonic grin, "there might not have been carfare in these rags."

He surveyed the offender again. Though the young man's clothes were rain-soaked, he could see they were clean and well made in the ready-to-wear sense. "Your first job?" he inquired in a more casual tone.

The burglar shifted about uneasily on his feet and pulled his damp, bedraggled hat down still more over his eyes.

"Wha—what's that to you?" he murmured defensively.

Though the attempt was brave enough, the voice was weak. It brought a dark smile to the older man's face.

"It is considerable to me," he said laconically. He stopped and fixed the prisoner with a piercing look. "In fact, what I decide to do with you," he went on, "will largely depend on your answers."

A gleam—perhaps of hope—came into the intruder's eyes.

"Really, I—" he started, and appeared to catch himself. "Sure; it's the first," he added in a horse voice.

"I thought so," commented the householder in satisfied tones. "How did you get in?"

"The—the window."

"That one there?"

"Ye-yes, sir!"

"Jimmy?"

"No; unlocked."

His questioner's face darkened in a way that boded ill for some careless servant. Then the quizzical, tantalizing smile returned.

"Are you broke?"

"Always."

"Do you consider that funny?" demanded his captor sharply.

Under his searching gaze the offender faltered and fumbled with his words.

"No-no, sir!" he answered nervously. "Tha-that's the way I am most of the time."

"H-m!" sounded the older man doubtfully. When he spoke again his tones were provoking. "Don't you think you could do better at some other calling?"

The flush surging to the young burglar's face told his inquisitor that he had touched the raw. With an amused look he waited for the other to finish the struggle with his emotions and speak.

"I guess so," finally came the answer. "Af-after this!" His tones were doleful, his look shamefaced.

"I'm sure of it," remarked the householder, his gray eyes now dancing with

amusement. "In fact, I was never more sure of anything in my life.

"Yes," he went on, as his prisoner continued silent. "You have about as much chance of becoming a successful burglar as you have of becoming—er—President."

His gibe caused the burglar to flush again.

"You—you're right," he admitted weakly. "And—and if I get out of this I'm going to try something else."

"The straight and narrow, eh?"

His affirmative nod was answer enough. Then the householder noticed he was shivering slightly.

"Chilled?"

"Little—I guess."

"Sit down here, and I'll get you something."

With a narrow glance at the open window the intruder seated himself on the edge of a chair. However, if he had any hopes of escape they were quickly shattered, for the man merely walked across the room and poured something from a bottle. "Here!" he said as he returned with a glass filled with amber-colored liquor. "This sherry will do you good."

For the first time the eyes of the young burglar openly encountered the gray ones of the householder. He accepted the proffered glass and choked down its contents. "Thanks," he said as he straightened up in his chair.

"Something to eat?" pursued the man.

His uninvited guest glanced at him furtively.

"I—I guess I've lost my appetite."

The householder's laugh was harsh and strident.

"Fear of a cell, eh?" he said with a sneer. "You've got a lot of nerve." With a quick stride he was at a buffet, whisking away a linen cloth that covered a tray. "Eat that," he ordered as he returned and placed it on the table in front of the prisoner. "It was a snack laid out for me.

"Go on," he urged, as the other made no move. "If it will help your appetite any I may say that I—"

"You won't turn me over to the bulls?" the intruder jerked out hopefully.

"I didn't say that. I was going to say that your liberty depends altogether on the way you act."

The young housebreaker eyed him, and then the tongue-and-lettuce sandwiches and the cup of cold bouillon. An instant later he was gulping down the food in a manner that brought a satisfied smile to the householder's face.

"Yes," went on the latter, as the last morsel disappeared from the tray, "everything depends on your actions—and your words, if truthful."

Slowly the color came back into the youth's face and he nodded understandingly.

"How did you come to pick out this house?"

"I—I thought I could find something valuable," was the hesitating reply.

"Naturally," the man opined dryly. "You could find something of value in any house in this neighborhood. What I'm trying to get at is whether you spotted this one before to-night—laid any plans?"

"No, sir; honestly, I didn't!"

"Just sort of came to this one—and found a window unlocked?"

"Yes-yes, sir!"

"And blundered right in?"

"Tha-that's right."

"Got a kit—tools, I mean?"

The young burglar shook his head.

"Nothing but a pocket-knife."

"Not even a gat?"

"A what, sir?"

"A gun."

"No-no, sir!" gasped his prisoner. "I—I wouldn't use it if I had one."

"Exactly. And that's why you will never make a burglar."

"I—I don't understand."

"No; and you never will," stated the man emphatically. "Do you know what the penalty for burglary is in this State?"

"Pretty heavy, I guess."

"Heavy is right. The limit is twenty years for the first offender—life for the old one!"

The young burglar shivered.

"Twenty years of your life," continued his captor musingly. "And yet you were not prepared to defend them."

"I—I was trying to get away when you—"

"When I discovered you—that's it exactly. Now if you had been armed and shot me you might have made your escape. Instead of that you are facing a long term in prison."

"Bu-but you said—"

"I know what I said," interrupted the householder sharply. "And you know that whether or not you go to prison entirely rests with me."

His prisoner gulped, but ventured nothing in reply.

"And yet if you'd had nerve enough to carry a gun you might have settled me. It's a good thing you struck this house."

"And you might have settled me," the burglar protested faintly.

Once more that dark smile lighted up the older man's face.

"True," he remarked casually. "That's the chance you would take."

"I don't like such chances."

"No!" with sarcastic emphasis. "And yet you chanced twenty years of your liberty."

"I never thought of it in that way," breathed the questioned one limply.

"And you value your liberty?"

"Who doesn't?"

"You—for one!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you! At the first peep from me you gave in; you made no attempt—"

"You—you should have got *my* first peep," interrupted the burglar nervously. "You—with that automatic pointed directly at me!"

"Bah! What of that? Wouldn't you rather face a gun with one of your own than face twenty years behind bars?"

"I don't know," said his guest, paling visibly. "I wouldn't want to take another man's life."

"Then you shouldn't start anything you can't finish."

The intruder stole a glance at his captor's face.

"You really don't mean that, do you, sir?"

"I certainly do, when I put myself in your place."

"But you're not in my place," observed the other sadly.

"No, I am not," admitted the householder more indulgently. "Nevertheless, I trust you see the lesson I've been trying to drive home, my young friend?"

"You've said it, sir. I see now that this is no business for me."

"You please me," was the satisfied remark. "I hate failure—even in a burglar—and you could never be anything else, as a burglar. For example," he went on in more oracular tones, "the way you went about your work here clearly indicates that you are unfitted for it."

"May I ask—" began the young man in a strange voice.

"Take that cellarette there," went on the householder. "You see several bottles of liquor on its top?"

"Yes, sir."

"A good burglar—perhaps an ordinary one might not go beyond the bottles—would want to see what was inside." He paused and surveyed the younger man with quizzical eyes. "Have you any idea of what he would find?"

"More booze, I guess."

"Nothing of the kind. He would find a safe, and in that safe several thousand dollars in booty."

"You don't say?" gasped his listener. His voice again took on that strange note. "Gee! I certainly missed a trick!"

"You missed more than a trick. You missed more silverware—in the butler's pantry—than you could carry away."

"I didn't notice—"

"No; I can't say that you did," was the sarcastic observation. "Otherwise, you might have noticed one or two small paintings in the library worth your attention, and a little rug right in front of you that is almost priceless."

"I never went in for that sort of thing," protested the intruder.

"No; you seem to have gone in for old clothes."

The burglar gulped again and looked down at the floor.

"You see," he explained. "I wanted to make sure that every one was asleep."

"And having made sure," commented

the older man dryly, "you proceeded to waken me by not watching your step."

"My step?"

"Yes; creaking on the stairway."

"Gee! Is that what got me in bad?"

"Nothing else." The man's dark smile returned. "So you see, you overlooked about everything, including the way out!"

For the first time, the intruder ventured to smile; and it was a thin smile.

"You've certainly handed it to me," he observed in an embarrassed manner. "And you've taught me several lessons."

"I hope watching your step is one of them?" remarked his eccentric host. "And that goes for banker or burglar."

"You—you seem to know a great deal about burglars?"

"I do," replied the householder with a queer smile.

"Have you met many?"

"Quite a number," again answered the older man with that same queer smile.

"Could I ask you one more question?"

"Fire away, my young friend."

"What is your name?"

The householder regarded the serious face opposite him for a moment; then he laughed lightly.

"What would you say if I told you it was Boody?"

A startled look came to the young man's face.

"Not—not Detective Sergeant Boody?"

"The same!"

For an instant the intruder appeared to be struggling with some emotion.

"If you are, I would say it was a miracle," he answered, with a rising inflection to his voice.

"A miracle? I don't understand!"

"If you're Boody—as you say," was the measured reply, "then you must be an astral body!"

"What's that you say?" barked the householder as he leaped from his chair.

His emotion did not appear to affect the young man.

"I said," he emphasized "that you must be his astral body, his spirit—"

"Explain that!" The gray-haired man's words shot out like so many bullets.

"I mean that Detective Sergeant Boody has been dead—for some hours!" came the staccatolike reply. "Body found on lawn—front of home!"

Not a muscle of the householder's face moved; but his eyes bored into the young man's like gimlets.

"How do you know that?" he jerked out.

"It's my business—to know things!" was the matter-of-fact announcement. Then the voice of the speaker hardened and his eyes narrowed. "I know that he was clubbed to death—probably with a blackjack—by some one who wanted him out of the way in a hurry; and I know—"

There came a buzzing sound. The householder's gaze traveled to a telephone instrument on the buffet and then quickly back to the young man.

"You know what?" he demanded.

As his tense tones reached the young man a mask seemed to drop from the latter's face. His eyes encountered and held those of the other man.

"I know," he stated steadily, "that the man who killed him hired a taxicab which he dismissed after the job was over at Greeley Square. Of course he called another taxi as soon as the other was out of sight." He stopped with a hard smile. "That looked curious to several of us who were sitting in a dairy lunch," he went on relentlessly, "so when we got the news of Boody's death shortly after we didn't lose much time in going after that driver!"

As he finished, the gray one's features contorted strangely.

"Then you're one of those damned newspaper—"

"Reporters!" finished the young man—and found himself gazing into the muzzle of an automatic for the second time that night. Though his face went white, his lips curled.

"A fat lot of good that 'll do you," he remarked scornfully. "You'll need an arsenal to get away!"

His open contempt and cock-sure words caused the other to hesitate.

"I don't get you!" he snarled.

The grating laugh which greeted his words brought a murderous look to his face.

"You'll have to bump off about a dozen

others—reporters surrounding the house—and maybe—"

As the young man spoke the eyes of the older one seemed to be searching his very soul.

"Damn you for a pack of meddlesome hounds," he interrupted explosively. Then he whirled toward the open window. "I'll see whether they can stop—"

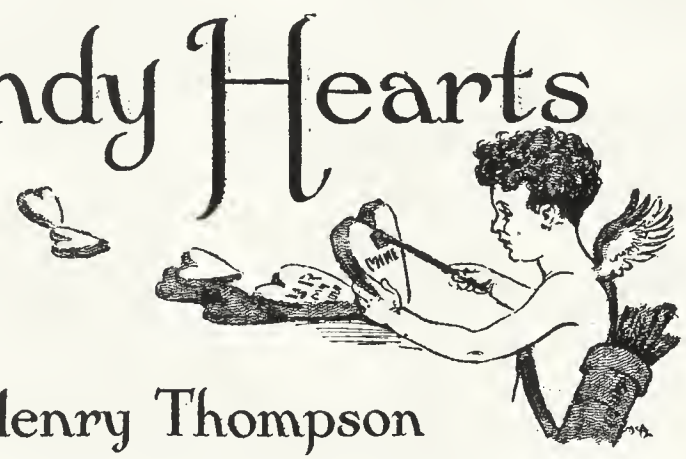
The sudden tread of heavy feet on the sidewalk sounded simultaneously with the clanging of a bell through the house. A baffled look swept the features of the man, and he jerked back from the window to face the young reporter. For a moment they stood eye-to-eye; then the sound of heavy pounding on some door came to them.

"And maybe bulls, is what I was going to say," breathed the young reporter. A satisfied note betrayed itself in his voice. "Yes; the bulls are here—and your jig is up!" He paused at a crash of splintering wood. "I guess the shoes fitted into the tracks on the lawn," he ended. "It was soft from the rain, you know!"

"What shoes?" inquired the other in a strangely muffled voice.

"The shoes I threw out of the window!" His eyes were bright as he regarded the other man. "You see, Mr.—er—Gray Fox, *you* didn't watch *your* step!"

Candy Hearts



by

James Henry Thompson

SOFT, golden rays of the mellow moon filtered through the pendant purple wisteria clusters and dimly lighted the dishpan into which Margaret May was shelling peas. A balmy breeze played with the auburn strands of her hair and caressed her ruddy cheeks. She hummed softly a song of yearning to the accompaniment of peas tinkling into the dishpan. She might have been a goddess from Olympus, stolen for this night to the Rogers's back porch.

Oh, pshaw!

That's no way to begin a story about Margaret May. The concomitance is all wrong. Moonlight, wisteria, balmy breeze, auburn tresses, naturally call for a pretty girl. Dishpan, peas and back porch just as naturally call for something else. It's deucedly difficult to make standards of fiction conform with facts.

Just as the rain falls on the just and the unjust, so moonlight sheds its beams impartially on beauty and ugliness. In fiction, however, moonlight is never splashed around lavishly except as the concomitant of a pretty girl. The messes into which an author gets in this way are terrible. He must either discard moonlight and stick to facts, or discard facts and drag in a pretty girl.

Good night, moonlight!

By no elasticity of imagination—even the superelastic imagination of a fictionist—could Margaret May be called a pretty girl. She might have started out in life as a fairly passable baby, but she had surely lost all claims to pulchritude somewhere between the cradle and the Rogers's back porch, where this story begins.

So forget the wisteria and moonlight and

the fragrant, balmy breeze. Let them avaunt!

And now arises another queer quirk of this conflict between fiction and fact: Romance must be served. Romance without moonlight, wisteria, and a pretty girl is quite likely to be stale, flat, and profitless. But romance is concocted of facts, and—

Again, oh, pshaw!

So here goes to tell of a romance minus a pretty girl, plus facts.

Margaret May might have been a goddess stolen from Olympus, but she wasn't. She was Rogers's hired girl from over Twitcham way, and she had been Rogers's hired girl for so long that none could remember when she wasn't.

The artful alliteration of Margaret May's given and surnames made it impossible to call her either Miss May or Margaret. She was always Margaret May, and the name carried a distinction in her small community. It was a synonym in common use. "As dumb as Margaret May," was a favorite reproof to unsatisfactory actions.

The great outstanding monument in Margaret May's life was erected to commemorate the time she had the fever. Any more detailed diagnosis of this malady had been erased by time. When Margaret May had the fever things happened that altered, not only the future course of her life and loves, but materially changed her charms.

The atrophy with which she had been affected had strangely and cruelly robbed her. Her hair had disappeared totally during her illness, and recovery had revealed that the disease had penetrated the cranial sutures, leaving the interior of her skull as bald of wit as the exterior was bare of hair.

Margaret May was much more concerned about her lack of tresses than about her pitiful paucity of brains. She could cover the bare areas of her scalp with a wig, but no artificiality has been devised to hide deficiency of wit save one—silence. Margaret May was conversationally a Sahara.

So it will be seen readily that moonlight had no business whatever monkeying around Margaret May and shedding its glamor of romance through the wisteria blooms and into her pan of peas.

But romance insists on being served. Also "ilka lassie has her laddie," and this would be no story at all if that were not so.

Margaret May covered her baldness with wigs and her hebetude with a closed mouth. That explains why the balmy breeze was able to toy with auburn tresses. The tresses may be explained by the fact that they were sewn fast to Margaret May's every-day wig. This workaday head covering was worn from sound principles of economy and prudence. Without her wig Margaret May was sure to catch a cold, and she had lived in terror of colds ever since Mrs. Rogers had remarked, during a convulsion of sneezing, that she was likely to sneeze her brains out.

Originally the auburn tresses had been chestnut. Some fault in dye that the wigmaker used had made that color transient. Margaret May complained that her hair was not fast color, but she was too thrifty to discard it. So on weekdays she wore the mangy wig, its strands all rusty and fading.

On Sundays she owned and wore a shiny black wig, purchased in trustful hope that the color might be less mutable than brown. The brunette coiffure was inseparable from her black silk dress, and reposed on secular days in a bureau drawer well perfumed with insecticides. The weekly transition from red to raven locks occasioned little comment, or criticism, so well was Margaret May established as a character.

Any more detailed description of Margaret May's shortcomings would be cruel. Enough has been said to make it perfectly clear that she and romance should have been utter strangers.

Sans hair, sans beauty, sans wit, Margaret May had a stranglehold on romance. She horned in on the summer night's fabric of moonlight and breezes with all her disqualifications, and the smell of pungent wood stain, with which she had been experimenting in an effort to rehabilitate her fading wig, mingled with the wisteria scents.

While she shucked the peas, the yearning song she hummed was a more or less

accurate rendition of the inspiring tune and words of a selection from Gospel Hymn No. 5:

Showers, showers of blessing,
Showers of blessing we need;
Mercy drops round us are falling,
But for the showers we plead.

It seemed very appropriate to Margaret May that the peas should be shelled to the accompaniment of a hymn, for it was Saturday night, and the peas were being prepared for Sunday dinner. She was in a mood for singing on Saturday nights, for they were traditionally notable nights in her placid life. On Saturday nights and Sundays Margaret May indulged her habit of intruding on the preserves of romance.

Saturday nights were times to sing, they were evenings devoted to music, much as the opera nights of more fortunate seekers for romance. Sundays were dedicated to shiny black wigs, fervid worship, and love. Both the eve and the day owed their importance to Irwin Fisher.

There was a quality—or rather a composite lack of qualities—about Irwin Fisher that made him an eminently proper suitor for Margaret May, and one for whom she need never suffer pangs of jealousy nor fear of loss. Irwin was nearly a total loss without insurance. Yet all of his shortcomings were balanced by his long, faithful, and apparently ardent devotion to Margaret May.

For eleven years Irwin had courted Margaret May. Such a long period of wooing might have been irksome to any other maid, but Margaret May accepted it gratefully, silently. To be sure, the only times Irwin displayed his affections were on Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons. He might have donned his love with his black suit on Saturday night and doffed it when he drew on his overalls to resume his labors as hired man on Monday morning.

Persistence is pretty good proof of love, and Irwin's love had been indubitably proven.

So Margaret May hummed and waited on the back porch for exactly the five hundred and seventy-second recurrent Saturday night demonstration of Irwin's fidelity.

Mrs. Rogers came to the back door.

"Happy, Margaret May?" she inquired.

"'Mercy drops round us are falling.' Yep," replied Margaret May, neatly combining music and conversation.

"You may leave the peas now and go to bed," gently ordered Mrs. Rogers.

Margaret May was of the sort that must be told when to do such things as to go to bed.

Then her mistress sniffed inquiringly and leaned closer to the tarnished wig.

"Mercy me! What on earth have you put on your hair?" she exclaimed.

Margaret May removed the wig and left her bald pate to reflect the romantic moonlight.

"Hair restorer," she said. "I tried some of that new mission oak stain Mr. Rogers got. I thought maybe it might help some, an', 'sides, it sounded kind o' religious. But it don't seem to work very well."

"You ought to put a coat of shellac on to set the color," advised Willie Rogers, who had followed his mother to the door.

"Now, Willie!" admonished Mrs. Rogers.

She hid a smile and remarked:

"It *don't* seem to be much of an improvement."

Discussion of the wig was interrupted by the preliminary toot of a cornet. The brazen notes sounded from the direction of the highway and took form in the melody of "When You and I Were Young, Maggie."

Margaret May dropped the dishpan of peas and hurriedly clapped her wig back on her skull, where it reposed somewhat askew, but modestly protecting.

"Oh, dear! Again!" sighed Mrs. Rogers.

"Gee! He's out early to-night!" said Willie.

Margaret May inclined her head to listen intently to the B-flat solo.

"He's got a new variation to-night," she announced. "I told him to play on the way to town an' not wait till he come home to wake everybody up."

"He better," growled Willie. "I had the old shotgun all loaded with rock salt waitin' for him."

"Eleven years of the same tune!" mused Mrs. Rogers.

"Ain't it beautiful!" sighed Margaret May.

The cornetist rose to frenzied musical heights. He triple-tongued and extemporized amazing runs and arpeggios, quavers and trills. To virtuostic passion rose the notes as the player melodically asseverated: "But to me you're fair as you were, Maggie." Then the music died away in a sentimental pianissimo finale that was intended to be sweetly prevailing, but was slightly flat.

Margaret May sighed again and turned to the door. As she retreated up the back stairs she resumed her tune: "Showers of blessing we crave."

The cornetist who had played this serenade was Irwin Fisher. His proficiency came from eleven years of Saturday-night rehearsals, during which time had been no change in his repertoire.

The one frivolity in Irwin's utterly serious life was his cornet. That instrument gained him admission to the Twitcham Silver Cornet Band, with which he rehearsed each Saturday night and marched and tooted in full glory of maroon uniform on state occasions. The trumpet also was medium of expression for his devotion to Margaret May, and no troubadour ever twanged his light guitar more blithely than Irwin.

It had been his custom to sound these musical amenities when he was returning from band practise, for then his puffed and tender lips made the votive melody seem like a sacrifice of suffering. Now Irwin had been requested to change the hour of his program to one less romantic and less disturbing to Saturday night slumbers.

Romance is rapidly being served. We now have moonlight and music, two exceedingly useful adjuncts to successful romance, and Margaret May is horning in. At the risk of an atrocious pun we might admit Irwin on the same terms.

Now Irwin Fisher was far from being a creature of romance. There was absolutely nothing light and airy about him. He had three passions—for music, for Margaret May, and for methodism. He was equally sincere in all.

There are these three passions in all men's lives—for art, for love of woman, and for some variation of piety. Irwin applied himself to one at a time with concentrated zeal.

To prove his zeal for art witness eleven years' playing of "When You and I Were Young, Maggie."

To prove his zeal for love of a woman witness eleven years' devotion to Margaret May.

To prove his zeal for an ardent faith witness the time when he spent nearly an entire night in the cow-barn, wrestling by the light of a smoky lantern to convert the sinful spirit of an unruly cow that had kicked him on the shins and spilled a pail of the evening's milking.

Margaret May accepted Irwin's sincerity in all things calmly, placidly, patiently. After his serenade she retired to untroubled slumber, nor feared that some other maid might steal the devotion that was hers. She did not waken even when Irwin, returning from an evening's struggle with "Poet and Peasant," halted before her chamber window and repeated his serenade with a glove stuffed in the bell of his cornet as a prudent mute. His simple act of devotion was born of long habit.

It occurs right here that another concomitant of romance is being passed up in this story. There is no eternal triangle. Here we have provided moonlight, music, balmy breezes, and wisteria flowers, but no pretty girl, no tresses at all, and not a rival lover in sight.

However, romance must be served.

At the Rogers's breakfast table the shifted schedule of Irwin's serenade was an absorbing topic of conversation.

"Didn't think he could switch that one-track mind of his," said Mr. Rogers. "If he gets to fluctuatin' 'round that way, he's liable to get fickle with Margaret May."

"No danger," replied Mrs. Rogers. "Both of them are sort of heaven-sent last resorts for each other."

"Well, if he don't show up prompt at three-thirty o'clock this afternoon we'll know something is wrong," declared Willie.

"'Mercy drops round us are falling—'" hummed Margaret May.

When the breakfast dishes had been done Margaret May shifted wigs and attended her devotions. Irwin sat in the same chapel, but aloof from her. One thing at a time was his motto. At the close of the service he did not exercise the traditional privilege of a "steady," and escort her home from church.

At exactly half past three that afternoon he opened the Rogers's front gate and made his way around the house toward the back porch, where the wisteria blossoms hung over Margaret May's black-wigged head, and a scorching sun had usurped the romantic moon.

The squeak of his shoes heralded his coming, and Margaret May smoothed her black silk in anticipation. He turned the corner, and approached the back porch with outstretched hand.

"Here! I've brought something for you," he said, as he extended a filled paper bag.

"Oh, thanks," said Margaret May.

Like the Saturday night serenades, this formula of Sunday-afternoon greeting had known no change in eleven years. The presentation, acceptance, and the form of gift had remained the same. Romance had been served good and proper.

"Sit down," invited Margaret May.

"Hot, ain't it?" said Irwin, as he accepted a seat.

"Yes," admitted Margaret May.

There is no need of reporting in detail the conversation. It was meager, stilted, and by rote. Monosyllabic assents and dissents, time-honored discussion of weather and crops, careful avoidance of personalities, robbed it of any interest except to the two who talked. Eleven years of repetition had not varied it nor made it stale.

It was exactly such conversation as romance has been served with these many years.

The paper bag is deserving of far more attention. For eleven years such prosaic containers had brought Margaret May concrete evidence of her lover's regard; they had held during that period protestations of his interest and sincerity; they had been guerdons of his constancy.

Margaret May was very fond of the paper bags, not for what they contained, but for what they meant.

For eleven years Irwin had purchased each Saturday night from the Twitcham general store these paper bags filled with his gifts. His selection never varied. The storekeeper had grown so used to his habit that he kept the confections ready weighed and waiting for his weekly customer.

The bag always contained candy motto hearts.

The saccharine comfits were pungent of such strong flavorings as sassafras and birch, colored in pale pinks and bilious yellows, and bore succinct declarations, economical of expression and letters.

"May I C U Home?" "I Want 2 B URS"; "Will U B Mine?" "U R My Ideal," "My Heart Beats 4 U;" so ran the legends on the hearts. There was the whole language of love, the whole gamut of affectionate vocabulary. The ingenious condensations, pithy and direct, made a complete lexicon of amours. Search as you will the code of romance, none of its essentials was missing on those candy carriers of Cupid's creed.

For eleven years Irwin had heaped these declarations in the lap of the coy Margaret May, and for eleven years she had accepted them modestly and with gracious thanks. They had played long at the game, and its rules had never changed.

So again, for the five hundred and seventy-second time, Margaret May emptied the paper bag in her black silk lap and began her Sabbath compilation of the language of romance.

Every Sunday for eleven years she had sorted the hearts into neat piles, each pile containing only those with the same motto. When the classification had been completed she had tabulated the result. For eleven years the score had stood very much like this:

Twenty: "May I C U Home's?"

Thirty-two: "U R My Ideal's."

Twenty-eight: "My Heart Beats 4 U's."

But never in the eleven years had there been a stack of hearts devoted to direct declaration of love or to propounding the culminating question of romance.

But romance will be served, all the same.

For eleven years Irwin had devoted the time between Sunday church services and Sunday calls on Margaret May to censorship. On each of the Sundays he had carefully expunged from the candy ritual of love those expressions that he deemed premature or forward. The hearts that contained these expressions he had carefully laid aside. Some of them he had eaten, and from their sweetness had nurtured his affection on sassafras flavored "I Love U's," and wintergreen "Will U B Mine's."

Once he had overlooked a jaundiced declaration of affection, and had thrilled and blushed when Margaret May had set it solitarily aside from the other piles. However, its very unfamiliarity had made it unintelligible to the object of his affections, and it had passed without comment until Irwin could hide it in a pocket.

Margaret May had played the game faithfully and well for the eleven years. She had never seemed to tire of the endless small talk of the amatorial hearts. Indeed, other lovers have said no more important things than the candy hearts told, and romances unnumbered have prospered on their expressive silences. Irwin, to his Margaret May, was as fluent as Dante to his Beatrice, or Abelard to his Heloise.

Although Margaret May was eager to assimilate the messages of the hearts mentally, she loathed their physical digestion. She had no objection to the symbolism, but she abhorred their taste.

This distaste was one of the few normal impulses of which the fever had not robbed her. So for eleven years she had counted the hearts, read their sugared meaning, and smiled her thanks, and for eleven years she had nibbled daintily and superficially each Sunday as a sop to love, but had sickened with stomachic qualms at sight of the lozenges. She, too, made her sacrifices to affection.

So now on this Sunday morning when romance was waiting so impatiently to be served, Irwin came bringing his paper bag of candy hearts.

Margaret May dumped them into her lap and began the sorting process. Her eyes grew large and her plain features expressed amazement as the hearts steadily grew into only two heaps. Then she tabulated and canvassed the returns:

Forty-eight "I Love U's."

Fifty-nine "Will U B Mine's?"

She lowered her gaze, and a blush crept to the very edge of her black wig. Then she sighed exactly as all maidens sigh when romance has been served:

"Oh, Irwin, this is so sudden!"

Romance, shorn of all its usual concomitants, had prevailed!

The next morning Margaret May came down to serve the Rogers's breakfast, and amazed the family by wearing her black Sunday wig. Its appearance on a weekday savored almost of sacrilege. Still more amazing was her request for half a day of leisure and permission to drive the old buggy horse to Twitcham that afternoon.

As she cleared away her household tasks she sang louder than ever: "'Showers of blessing we crave.'"

When the plodding buggy horse had been hitched to the platform wagon and driven to the gate for Margaret May's use she lugged forth from their attic storehouse five grain sacks filled with mysterious freight and piled them in the wagon. Then she drove off in the direction of the village.

In the village she halted before the Twitcham Deaf and Dumb Institute and made her way to the executive office. There she addressed the matron in charge:

"I brought a donation."

Without waiting for direction, invitation, or acceptance of her gift, she dragged the five grain sacks from the platform wagon into the office.

"There's some candy motto hearts. I thought they might come in handy here."

The surprised matron had no chance to express her surprise before Margaret May, in a burst of volubility, went on:

"I won't need to keep 'em any longer. I'm goin' to be married now, an' they ain't no use in bein' foolish 'bout candy hearts after you're married. Thought maybe they'd help the dumb folks to get some showers of blessing."

And before the matron could grasp the tremendous import of the five sacks of potential romances, Margaret May had returned to her equipage and driven away.

The Log-Book

By the Editor

POSSIBLY you may have read in the papers reports of the peculiar signals wireless instruments have recently been picking up coming from great distances. Marconi, interviewed by a London daily on the subject, admitted that there might be a possibility of these signals being attempts from one of the planets to communicate with the earth. Oddly enough, as far back as February, 1904, THE ARGOSY printed a story just along these lines.

It was written by Masters B. Stevens, and called "The Blue Death," detailing how in 1907 individuals dropped dead all over the country, stricken down in mysterious fashion, each with a round, blue mark in his forehead. "The excitement resembled that of the previous year," ran one of the sentences, "when we found it necessary to oust Germany, by force of arms, from South American territory."

Investigation by a professor developed the fact that the deaths were caused by the inhabitants of Mars, who took this means of letting Earth know that it was using an abnormal amount of electricity, thus robbing the sister planet of its share. The fatalities did not cease until generation of electricity was stopped for a certain period. According to the story, the crisis was brought about by a sun-spot cycle, occurring every fourteen years, the next one being due in 1921, "when generation must again cease for a space of four weeks. The time for cessation will be indicated by a light signal from Mars—in flashes which will make the letter 'Y' in our Morse telegraph alphabet."

I need not remind my readers that there was no mysterious wholesale slaughter in 1907—although we did have the big financial panic then, but it is certainly a singular coincidence that we should be receiving mysterious signals so close to the period when, according to this ARGOSY story, printed sixteen years ago, we must be on our guard again because of our excessive use of electricity.

* * *

"To Bee or Not to Bee" might serve equally as well for the title of our complete novelette for next week, which is,

"NOT ON THE FIELD OF RUNNYMEDE"

BY FRANK BLIGHTON

Author of "Without a Rehearsal," "Alias the Angleworm," etc.

and, discarding the jocose for the romantic, one might suspect that fair ladies and gallant knights adorn the story—and so they do, even if they are not present in the flesh. But, whimsical or not, amusing or not (and it is nothing if not a masterpiece of gentle satire), it is a very real tale of very real and human people—and that's something of a rarity nowadays. And there's nothing machine-made about the story, except that it was typed, in the first place, by a magician whose gold-plated Italians won't trespass on your patience, at any rate, because they are entirely different from

diamond-backed Russians, for instance, or cross-eyed Chinese. You'll read about a Hubbard squash that in the end became "some pumpkins," even if he did hide his light under a bushel; or, rather, a hive—and as far as that is concerned, he carried a sting, too, as *Sutton,* the subtle, discovered to his cost. This is published complete in THE ARGOSY for March 20.

A sea of intrigue, stretching to a gloomy horizon, was *Arthur Lake's* introduction to romance—somehow sinister, yet strangely compelling, drawing him onward into a vortex whose depths no man has plumbed.

"THE GREAT DISCOVERY"

BY CHARLES V. BARNEY

Author of "Texas Fever," etc.

encompasses the new world and the old, and the seas between, and voyaging with this brilliant company, there will you meet *Christopher,* whom you have known aforetime; *Judith,* jewel of constancy; *Naonita,* dusky bride of death; *Sansito,* arch-plotter; and *Arthur Lake* himself, at once prince and paladin, yet a common seaman withal. One might call this a romance of the Great Adventurer were it not preeminently the story of Youth and Love—and Youth, as we know well, must be served. And in the end two made the Great Discovery, which, after all, who can say, was not a greater than *Christopher's?* Five generous instalments begin in THE ARGOSY for March 20.

Your friend, *Joe Conner,* will be back again next week, and under the direction of Raymond J. Brown will tell you all about "MAKING A MAN OF CLAUDE," really the most extraordinary story I have given you in a month of Sundays. And yet it's wholly human from start to finish. You who have been asking for more railroad tales will be delighted with "HIS IRON NERVE," by Charles Wesley Sanders, which, beside showing you the inside workings of an engineer's mind, tends to throw an interesting sidelight on bachelors in contrast with married men. So don't miss it. Theatrical stories are almost invariably popular, for everybody is eager to obtain a glimpse behind the scenes. James Henry Thompson will give you more than an eyeful in "POOR LITTLE BUTTERFLY," the tale of the quietest girl in a certain burlesque show, and how she tried to wake herself up, almost with disastrous consequences.

THAT CALIFORNIA CLIMATE

San Diego, California.

Where else except in this sunny southland could one enjoy life and aquaplaning on Christmas Day? Aquaplaning is riding a surf-board fastened on a motor-launch and is very popular in the Harbor of the Sun. I could fill pages with the beauty of San Diego; nothing to find against it, and I've been over this U. S. A., from the Gulf to the north and from New York to Vancouver, British Columbia.

Will close, wishing THE ARGOSY prosperity. I have read it for almost ten years, so you know I think it is the best. CHARLES LEE.

ROMANCE, REALISM, MYSTERY ALL IN THE ARGOSY

St. Louis, Missouri.

I have never noticed any letter from St. Louis, and thought I would drop in a few words. Surely there are people in St. Louis reading THE ARGOSY. I for one read it from cover to cover every week. I like all the stories, and especially detective stories of mystery. But I haven't found any of them dull.

As for Brown and Jones, my idea is to give us some stories of each kind: some of romance and some of realism. I'm not complaining. I like THE ARGOSY, just as it is. "The Red Road" was a wonderful novelette. Please don't change THE ARGOSY to a semi-monthly. They are far enough apart now. L. G. A.

"DON'T DO IT"

Ontario, Canada.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for about a year, and have missed only one copy. It seems to get better all the time. Among many of the stories that I like there are some that I like better. Among these are: "Everything but the Truth," by Edgar Franklin; "The Ship That Crumbled,"

by Loring Brent; "The Golden Cat," by George F. Worts, and "The Duke of Chimney Butte." Most all of the short stories were good.

Some readers suggest that you take our favorite weekly and make a semi-monthly out of it. Don't do it. Perhaps this reader cannot keep up with the stories, but the rest of us can.

The Log-Book is fine, too. About the most interesting part of the magazine, I think. I never fail to read the letters. Here it seems that all of the readers get together. Lots of friends are made here. I can say that I, at least, found a good friend through the Log-Book.

F. CHIEF LONE EAGLE.

FINDS VARIETY IN SELTZER'S STORIES

Springfield, Ohio.

I have been reading THE ARGOSY for about two years, and think it is fine. Charles Alden Seltzer is, in my opinion, your best writer. The author of "The Duke of Chimney Butte" is a good writer. I just wonder what kind of a magazine THE ARGOSY would be if that "Morris" was editor. He just makes me tired. He talked about people not kicking about stories, but to tell the truth he put "kicks" enough in his one letter to last a hundred years.

I can't see where Seltzer's stories are all alike. Every one is the best there is. If Mr. Morris doesn't like his stories, why does he read them? Your Western stories are fine. So give us some more of them. "Drag Harlan" is great. I think "Forbidden Trails," "Beau Rand," "Cold Steel," "Sultan of Marib," and "Square Deal Sanderson" are fine. I did not get to read the latter story, but I have seen it in motion-pictures with my favorite star, William S. Hart, and it is fine.

NELLIE BAINTER.

SELTZER, HOPKINS AND WORTZ

Spokane, Washington.

Thought it was time you heard more from me, and that you might care to know what I think of THE ARGOSY stuff to date. Well, I'll say it's great. "Drag Harlan" is going "over the top" in a way that ought to make Chuck Seltzer push out his chest in pride. Persons here who saw "Square Deal Sanderson" in the movies claim that if the dramatization of this latest novel is as good as the yarn itself, there will be a case of S. R. O. In my own opinion, you said a lungful when you said this was Chuck's latest and best. *It is!*

"Skack of the Everglades" starts with a snap and vim that grips the reader with the first line. I recall having spoken several disagreeable things about Hopkins's yarns of a few years back, but here's where I take my helmet off to him, with the hope that his blessed old soul in heaven will forgive me for what I sincerely believed as the truth. It is a queer fact, then, that his very last story should be the best he has ever written, which is gurgling a whole lot when one remembers "The Road to Trouble," and "Hoodoo Ranch."

"Woolies on the Brain" brings a chuckle among the American Legion boys here at the mere mention of the title. Instead of saying that some one has a "pipe dream," they simply grunt: "Woolies on the brain, that's all." One well-known chap went to the bulletin-board and wrote this: "Cooties eat you while you sleep; but the lowest thing I know is sheep." I wonder is he a sheepman or cattleman?

I got the number beginning the erstwhile Loring Brent's "Golden Cat," and have recommended it to all those who want a red-blooded, thrilling, odd and mysterious yarn of unknown regions. Many of the bunch have read the "Peter the Brazen" novelettes while in France, and at the announcement of a new one they simply—oh, what's the use o' talkin'?

What do you think about running an around the world adventure series? I'm mentioning the fact that it ought to go good. Bertram Lebhar could do it *muy bueno;* he, or else George Worts. I'm following THE ARGOSY right along, and, believe me, I'll *shore* boost it. So-long until next time.

WILLIAM RAND LOESCHER.

(Recently Battery D, 335th F. A., A. E. F.)

HAVING IT OUT WITH "A SOLDIER"

Birmingham, Alabama.

Have read this book for several years, when I could get it, and this is the first time I have ever been forced to open up in any of the arguments going on in our Log-Book. But now I have a lot to say.

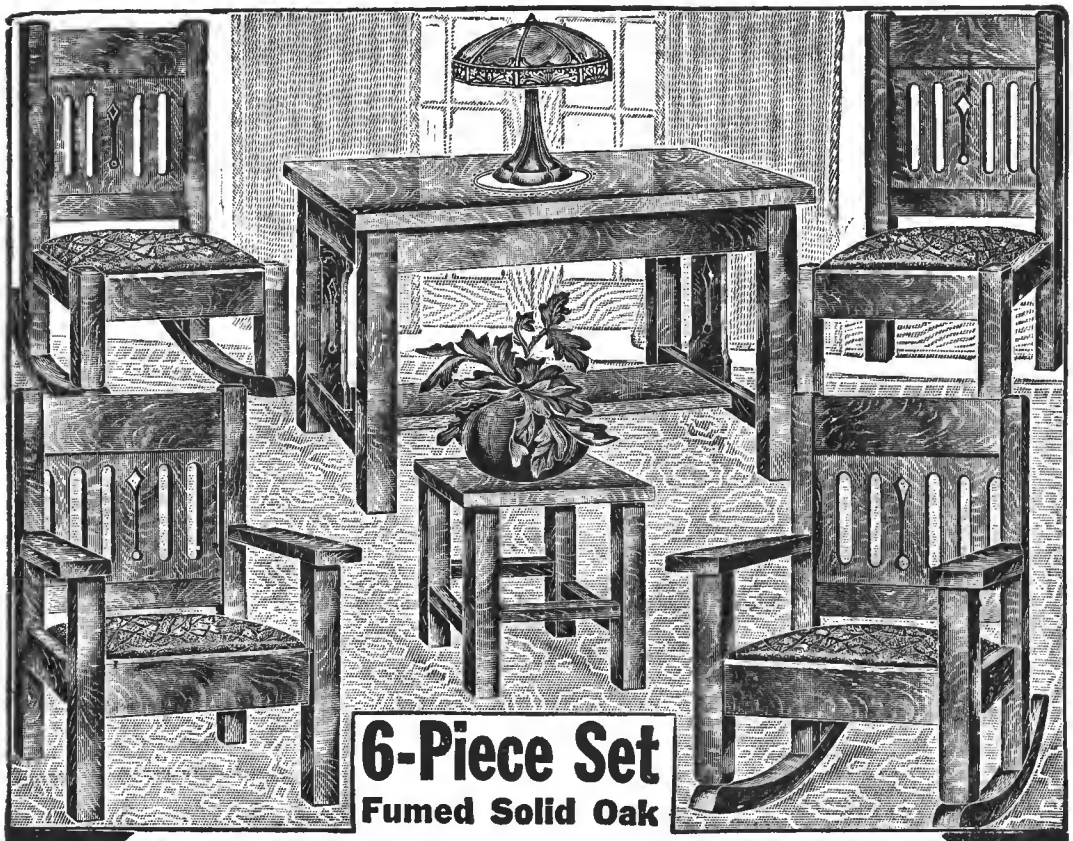
In the Log of December 20 comes one from a party who signs himself "A Soldier," and mentions the regular army. I wonder, my friend-soldier, if you ever were within a mile of a company of regulars. I have not had eighteen years' service; I have not held the *high* rank of top-kicker, but I have had four and a half years of service, and have been everything from K. P. to sergeant, and in all that time I have seen very few men that I would mind my sister writing to while they were facing death for her. I would have considered it a very small thing for her to let them know that she and millions of others like her were trying to help them on with a kind word and a warm pair of socks.

I wonder if you went over, and if so, did you ever get that letter from mother, dad, or little sister. They were so proud of their big boy, way out there fighting for them, and the rest of the world. And that letter bucked you up. It put more courage in you, and then you read it to your bunkie, and when you looked at him after you were through you saw him looking the other way. You thought he had not been very interested in your letter, but he had; he had heard every word, and would remember it a long time. He had been over there a long time, and had probably got three or four cards from the Red Cross. Didn't have much to buck him up, did he? Still, he was a fine fellow.

Do you think it would have been wrong for little sis to drop him a line, or one of her girl friends? And there were hundreds of others, with death just a yard out there, and he went to meet it lonesome. My sister corresponded with three over there, and I was proud of it, and was proud of them, because I read a number of their letters after I came home, and I believe they were better and stronger men for receiving her little notes.

I have read THE ARGOSY and no other for a long time, and this is my first offense on the Log-book; but the Girl of the Golden West, Monroe Jones, and A Soldier get my nanny.

R. RANDSOME.



6-Piece Set
Fumed Solid Oak

$1.00 Down

A Room Full of Furniture

Send only 1.00 and we will ship you this handsome 6-piece library set. Only $1.00 down and then $2.90 per month, or $32.90 in all. A positively staggering value, and one of the biggest bargains we have ever offered. Look at this massive set, clip the coupon below and have it shipped on approval. Then see for yourself what a beautiful set it is. If you do not like it, return it in 30 days and we will return your money. All you have to do is to send the coupon with $1.00. This magnificent library set is not shown in our regular catalog. The value is so wonderful and the demand so great that there aren't enough to go around, so send today sure. Either have set sent for you to see, or tell us to mail catalog.

6 Pieces This superb six-piece library set is made of selected solid oak throughout, finished in rich dull waxed, brown fumed oak. Large arm rocker and arm chair are 36 inches high, seats 19x19 inches. Sewing rocker and reception chair are 36 inches high, seats 17x17 inches. All four pieces are padded, seats upholstered in brown imitation Spanish leather. Library table has 24x34 inch top, with roomy magazine shelf below, and beautifully designed ends. Jardiniere stands measures 17 inches high, with 12 inch top. Clip the coupon below, and send to us with $1.00, and we will ship the entire six pieces, subject to your approval. **No C. O. D.** Shipped knocked down so as to save you as much as one-half of the freight charges. Easy to set up. Shipping weight about 175 pounds. **Order by No. B5971A. Send $1.00 cash with order; $2.90 monthly. Price $32.90. No discount for cash. Pieces not sold separately.**

Act Now—While This Special Offer Lasts

Don't wait a day longer. Sit down today and send in coupon for this 6-piece Fumed Solid Oak Library Set. For a limited time only are we able to offer you this stupendous bargain. Prices, as you know, on everything are going up, up, up. It is impossible to tell just what day it will be necessary for us to increase the price of this wonderful Fumed Solid Oak Library Set. So act, but act quickly. Fill out coupon, send it to us with first small payment and we'll ship you this wonderful 6-piece Fumed Solid Oak Library Set.

Easy Payments!

Open an account with us. We trust honest people, anywhere in the U. S. Send for this wonderful bargain shown above or choose from our big catalog. One price to all, cash or credit. **No discount for cash.** Not one penny extra for credit. Do not ask for a special cash price. We cannot offer any discount from these sensational prices. **No C. O. D.**

30 Days' Trial

Our guarantee protects you. If not perfectly satisfied, return the article at our expense within 30 days and get your money back—also any freight you paid. Could any offer be fairer?

Free Bargain Catalog

Shows thousands of bargains in furniture, jewelry, carpets, rugs, curtains, silverware, stoves, porch and lawn furniture, women's, men's and children's wearing apparel.

Send this Coupon

Along with $1.00 to us now. Have this fine library set shipped on 30 days' trial. We will also send our big Bargain Catalog listing thousands of amazing bargains. Only a small first payment and balance in monthly payments for anything you want. Don't delay. Act now while this special offer lasts. Send the coupon now.

Straus & Schram DEPT. 1073 **W. 35th St., Chicago, Ill.**

Free Trial Coupon
Straus & Schram
Dept. 1073
W. 35th St., Chicago, Ill.

Enclosed find $1.00. Ship special advertised 6-piece Fumed Oak Library Suite. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If I keep the suite, I will pay you $2.90 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return the suite within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight charges I paid.

☐ 6-Piece Library Set, No. B5971A, $32.90.

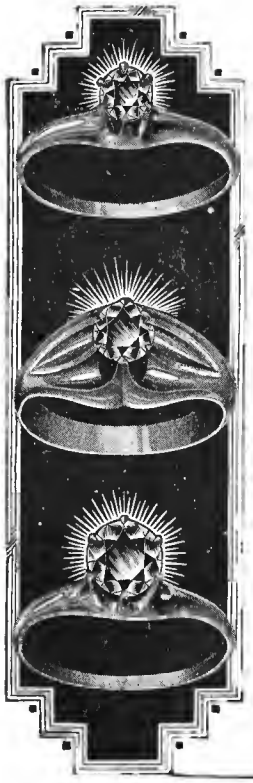
Name.....

St., R.F.D. or Box No......

Shipping Point.....

Post Office.....*State*.....

If you ONLY want catalog put X in proper box below.
☐ Furniture, Stoves and Jewelry
☐ Men's, Women's and Children's Clothing ☐ Roofing



Sent On Approval

Write for our great Diamond Loan Bulletin at once. On our great special offer any diamond in our catalog or bulletin will be shipped on approval. Don't send a penny. Examine these great offerings. See for yourself that we never misrepresent. Get the Bulletin.

Send the Coupon Now for Great Diamond Loan Bulletin

Fresh from the press. Newest and greatest bargains just released to the public. Get full details. Valuable diamonds at much less than real value because owners did not pay back money loaned. Compare our prices with your local jeweler. If you can duplicate at 40% more send the diamond back. In business over one-third of a century. Approved by great banks. We lend money on valuable jewels. When our loans are not paid on these pledges, we must sell regardless of current prices.

Don't Delay

Hurry, hurry—don't wait. Time is flying. Only one great bargain of a kind. Send the coupon now for Diamond Loan Bulletin. First come — first served Don't send a penny. Just your name and address. But write now.

L. Goldman's Sons
Dept. 1453, 1303 Grand Ave., Kansas City, Mo.

Bargain Bulletin

L. Goldman's Sons
Dept. 1453, 1303 Grand Ave., Kansas City, Mo.
Please send me at once your catalog and latest Diamond Loan Bulletin.

Name.....

Address..... *R.F.D.*.....

City.....*State*.....

Akron Quality Tires

REDUCE TIRE COST 65%

1 Tube and 1 Tire FREE *Its in the Guarantee*

4500-Mile Guarantee

We can safely make this guarantee, as **Akron Quality Tires** are made of all selected material, are all wonderful bargains and will outwear any two rebuilt or vulcanized tires. Our written guarantee in every tire provides for a new tube and tire free if mileage is not given. These double fabric tires are built strong and substantial, long to wear and hard to puncture.

The following prices for this month

Size	Tire	Tube
30x3	$ 5.50	$2.00
30x3 1-2	6.50	2.10
32x3 1-2 S. S. only	7.50	2.20
31x4	8.50	2.40
32x4	8.75	2.45
33x4	9.00	2.50
34x4	9.25	2.60
34x4 1-2	10.75	2.80
35x4 1-2	11.00	2.90
36x4 1-2	11.50	3.00
35x5	12.25	3.20
37x5	13.00	3.50

Reliner Free With Every Tire

State whether straight side or clincher desired. Send $2 deposit for each tire ordered and $1 for tube; balance C. O. D. subject to examination. If you send full amount with order, deduct 5 per cent discount.

Mail Order Dept. 21
AKRON TIRE & RUBBER CO.
2000 ROOSEVELT ROAD CHICAGO, ILL.

Let Us Send You this Suit

made to your measure, payable after received, with the clear understanding that if the fit is not perfect or if you are not satisfied in every way, if you are not convinced you have received a fine, high grade, stylish, perfect-fitting tailored suit made to your measures and have saved $15.00 to $20.00, you are not under the slightest obligation to keep it.

Don't hesitate or feel timid, simply send the suit back, no cost to you. You are not out one penny. Any money you may have paid us is refunded at once.

Samples Free. Any man young or old interested in saving money, who wants to dress well and not feel extravagant is invited to write us for our free book of samples and fashions explaining everything. Please write letter or postal today, just say "Send me your samples" and get our whole proposition by return mail. Try it—costs you nothing—just a postal, get the free samples and prices anyway. You will learn something important about dressing well and saving money.

PARK TAILORING COMPANY
Dept. 21 Chicago, Ill.

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE

This 5 Passenger, 4 cylinder, 37 H. P. BUSH Car—Timken Bearings—Willard Batteries—2 Unit Starting & Ltg.—116-inch wheel base. Write at once for the best Automobile Offer in existence—Don't wait—Cars guaranteed or money back.

BUSH MOTOR CO. Address J. H. BUSH, President, Dept. D180, Bush Temple, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

GET WELL—BE YOUNG—GROW TALL

This Universelty discovery is the most important health invention of the century. It remakes and rejuvenates the Human Body. It produces normal spines. It frees impinged and irritated nerves, corrects contracted muscles, shortened ligaments, eliminates congestion, improves circulation and drainage of the body. It will increase the body's length.

THE PANDICULATOR CO., 250 Advance Bldg., Cleveland, O.

A GOOD FLORIDA (17c) LUNCHEON

Along about Christmas time a little town in Florida held a Farmers' Rally, and the Club-women were able to give the 500 persons in attendance a splendid Noon-luncheon, according to press reports—for 17 cents per plate. Most of the articles appearing on the Menu were *home-grown*.

The High-Cost-of-Living today is bearing down most heavily on salaried folks—office managers, clerks, professional men, and others of that class. According to Bradstreet's, living costs stood last December at 131 per cent above pre-war level. Profiteering, extravagance and inflation of the currency all have their effect, but the real, fundamental, underlying cause of our troubles is UNDER-PRODUCTION.

Florida growers, however, need worry but little about their own living costs, when you consider the big prices they receive for luxuries shipped north in mid-winter. The Christmas strawberries brought them from 90c to $1.00 and as high as $1.46 per quart, after shipping and selling expenses were paid. In December Green String Beans brought close to $6.00 per hamper in New York. Tomatoes shipped to Northern markets brought $2.75 to $4.00 per crate, and Peppers, $3.25.

The Leesburg Commercial states: "We visited a twelve-acre farm Saturday—ten acres in fruit and the crop sold on the trees this season for $10,000 cash. Cost of production was $1,100, leaving $8,900 for interest on the investment—nearly 18 per cent on a value of $5,000 per acre."

These are not "Pipe Dreams"; they are **Florida Facts.** Grove land that is at present in an uncultivated state will not last forever in Florida—note the lesson of California. I own and am offering for sale in Orange County some of the finest orange and trucking lands in the state.

Truck gardeners near Orlando cleared as high as $1,500 an acre from head lettuce last year. We have copies of their signed testimonial letters in our book. Many of these truck gardeners are Northern men and they know our summer climate is cool and more pleasant than in Northern states.

Here is OPPORTUNITY reduced to its simplest terms. All you need is a moderate amount of capital and a little knowledge of farming. We will clear and cultivate your land on our fair and equitable TEN PER CENT ABOVE COST PLAN. Send for our Big Free Book—TWENTY ACRES AND PLENTY. It tells all about our dollar-an-acre monthly payments, sick and out of work clauses and other attractive features. **Address Sylvester E. Wilson, Dept. M2, Orlando, Florida.**

(NOTE: Mr. Wilson is Treasurer and principal owner of the Produce Reporter Company, Chicago, publishers of the "Blue Book," which is to the Fruit and Produce Trade what Dun's and Bradstreet are in other commercial fields.)

A Wife Too Many

Into the hotel lobby walked a beautiful woman and a distinguished man. Little indeed did the gay and gallant crowd know that around these heads there flew stories of terror—of murder—and treason. That on their entrance, half a dozen detectives sprang up from different parts of the place.

Because of them the lights of the War Department in Washington blazed far into the night. With their fate was wound the tragedy of a broken marriage, of a fortune lost, of a nation betrayed.

It is a wonderful story with the kind of mystery that you will sit up nights trying to fathom. It is just one of the stories fashioned by that master of mystery

CRAIG KENNEDY

The American Sherlock Holmes

ARTHUR B. REEVE

The American Conan Doyle

He is the detective genius of our age. He has taken science—science that stands for this age—and allied it to the mystery and romance of detective fiction. Even to the smallest detail, every bit of the plot is worked out scientifically. For nearly ten years, America has been watching his Craig Kennedy—marvelling at the strange, new, startling things that detective hero would unfold.

FREE—POE

10 Volumes

To those who send the coupon promptly, we will give FREE a set of Edgar Allan Poe's works in 10 volumes.

When the police of New York failed to solve one of the most fearful murder mysteries of the time, Edgar Allan Poe—far off in Paris—found the solution.

The story is in these volumes.

In England and France, Edgar Allan Poe is held to be the greatest writer that America has produced. To them he is the great American classic.

This is a wonderful combination. Here are two of the greatest writers of mystery and scientific detective stories. You can get the Reeve at a remarkably low price and the Poe FREE for a short time only. Sign and mail the coupon **now.**

HARPER & BROTHERS **(Established 1817)**

Cut out this coupon and mail it today

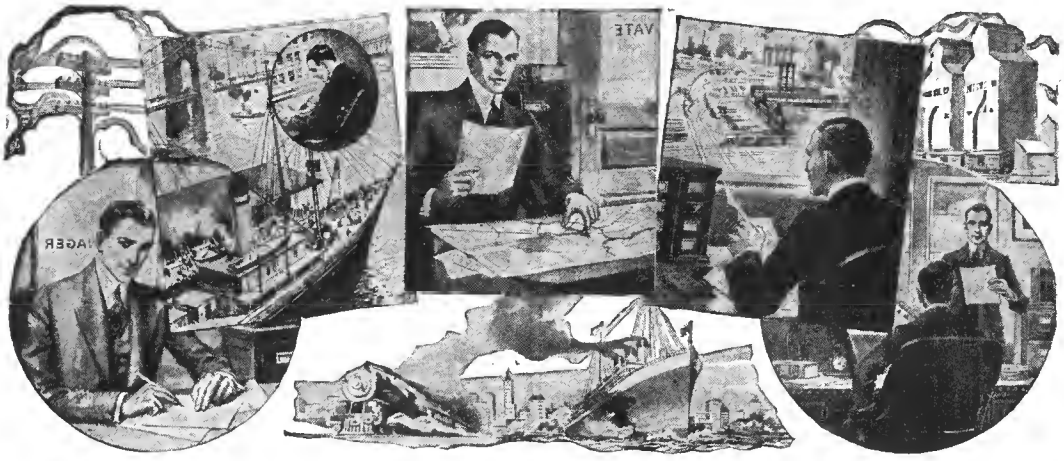
HARPER & BROTHERS, 32 Franklin Square, New York A-S.Arg. 3-13-20

Send me, all charges prepaid, set of Arthur B. Reeve—in 12 volumes. Also send me, absolutely free, the set of Edgar Allan Poe—in 10 volumes. If the books are not satisfactory I will return both sets within 10 days at your expense. Otherwise I will send you $1 within 5 days and $2 a month for 14 months.

Name.....

Address.....

Occupation.....



A Bigger Job Yours—If You Master

Traffic Management

Reconstruction work to be done in Europe and expansion of our foreign trade means a greater demand than ever before for men trained as traffic experts. Great plants working overtime—raw materials shipped in—finished products shipped out—carloads, trainloads, shiploads, going North, East, South, West—contracts placed not on price basis, but for quick delivery—that is the condition we are facing.

"We must have efficient traffic men" say manufacturers, jobbers, railroads, ship owners. Hundreds are needed where one is available. This is the chance for ambitious men to rise to higher positions—to get into an uncrowded calling—to have the specialized knowledge which commands big salaries.

Train by Mail Under LaSalle Experts

This opportunity is yours now. Train while you hold your present job. Only your spare time required to become proficient in every branch of traffic.

Learn from men who have held or are among those now holding the highest positions in the field. Get practical training—the training which equips you to step into one of the highest places. This is what the LaSalle experts offer you.

They will explain every point concerning Freight Rates Classifications, Tariffs, Bills of Lading, Routing, Claims, Demurrage, Express Rates, Ocean Traffic, R. R. Organization, Regulation and Management, Laws of Carriers, Interstate Commerce Rulings, etc. etc.

How many men are expert on even one of these subjects? You will be made proficient in all.

And here is something more—your enrollment gives you free the privileges of our Business Consulting Service. This means advice from our staff whenever you need help on any special business problem.

Over 950 people here—450 business experts among them—are ready to put you on the road that leads directly to advancement. Get the complete, combined experience of many authorities, all given in easily understood form.

No Large Fees

The total cost is small. Your increase in earnings will soon pay it (see in next column what McMullen, Wright and other members say). Then also you can pay on easy terms—a little each month if you wish. No hardship in getting this training. Any man can afford it. And the time is now—when the great movement in business is beginning. Give a few hours weekly of your spare time for a few months—and get a larger salary.

Send the Coupon and Get All the Facts

Your request will bring complete information. We will tell you just what the course offers in every detail; all about the opportunities open to trained traffic men. We will also send you our book, "Ten Years Promotion in One" which has shown thousands of men the short road to promotion. If you are ambitious to rise—if you want to enter a paying and uncrowded field of business, get these facts. Sending the coupon implies no obligation upon you. Mail it today.

B. S. McMullen was a freight checker on the docks at Seattle.

Two years after beginning the LaSalle Course in Interstate Commerce and Traffic Management he was appointed General Freight and Passenger Agent.

He said that it would probably have taken him 8 or 10 years to make this advance if he had depended merely upon work and experience.

LaSalle experts helped him to reach the top in the space of months.

T. J. Wright, an Illinois member, reports three promotions since taking the course.

H. S. Watson, of Michigan, figures his increased earning capacity at 400 per cent.

Fred Hoffman, an Ohio member, reports 500 per cent profit on his investment in one year.

Among the many LaSalle trained men who are now Traffic Managers or Experts on Interstate Commerce are:

Wm. Ritchie, Vice-President and Traffic Manager, Philadelphia Lawn Mower Co.

F. E. Combs, Traffic Director, Twin City Traffic League, Benton Harbor, Michigan.

F. E. Hamilton, Traffic Manager, Retail Merchants Association of Canada.

Mr. Hamilton says: "I cannot speak too highly of this institution. The course is up-to-date, authentic, and easily understood. My only regret is that I did not take it up five years ago."

The success these men have made can be paralleled by any other ambitious man who will do as they did—train!

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

"The Largest Business Training Institution in the World"

Dept. 332-T **Chicago, Illinois**

Please send me your catalog and full information on your Course and Consulting Service in Interstate Commerce and Railway Traffic. Also a copy of your valuable book for the ambitious man, "Ten Years' Promotion In One." This without obligation on my part.

Name .....

Address .....

Present Position .....

Saved $64.00 On A Diamond

A Nevada customer writes: "My first purchase, a $136.00 diamond, appraised at $200.00. . . . Sold it for $185.00. Next purchase an absolutely flawless diamond for my wife. Thanks for goods that are more than expected."—*Full name on request.*

How to Save on Diamonds

This nearly ¾ century old house, in the diamond banking business, rated at more than $1,000,000.00, lends money on diamonds and high grade jewels. We have an extremely large number of diamonds to offer far below full market prices. We send to you absolutely free on approval to examine and have valued by any expert you wish. Then try to match at 60% more, that's our challenge.

Why Pay Full Prices

Saved Half on Rings

"The $69 and $75 rings I received from you I could not duplicate here for double your price and I could sell them for more than I paid you." R. C.——, Marion, Indiana.

$105.00 Extra Value

"You have a life customer in me. My $45 cluster ring you sent is valued here at $150.00." M. H. B.——, Ardmore, Okl.

Saved Me $40.00

"The $35 diamond ring is a beauty. Could not have bought one here like it for less than $75.00." A. D.——, Iron Mountain, Mich.

$75.00 Ring Appraised at $162.00

"The stone I bought of you for $75 I could not duplicate for less than $162.00. I am delighted." F. L.——, Hope, Arkansas.

Full names on request. These are only specimens of the hundreds of letters we receive from customers delighted with their wonderful bargains.

Send for Latest List

See Our Unpaid Loan Diamond Bargains

Send your name and address for our wonderful lists and bulletins of amazing bargains. Radically different from any regular catalog. You can't begin to realize the fine values and wonderful savings until you see for yourself. Every jewel accurately described in detail. You have the opportunity free to verify everything before you buy. Write for these marvelous lists of diamond bargains—sent free—no obligations. Our guaranteed loans like insurance policies—ask about them.

Jos. DeRoy & Sons, *Only Opp. Post Office*
1660 DeRoy Building **Pittsburgh, Pa.**

References by permission—Bank of Pittsburgh, N. A., Marine National Bank, Union Trust Company, Pittsburgh, Pa. Your bank can look us up in mercantile agencies.

Jos. DeRoy & Sons
Only Opp. Post Office
1660 DeRoy Bldg. **Pittsburgh, Pa.**

Gentlemen:—Please send me free and prepaid, your new Bargain Bulletin of diamonds, watches and other jewelery. It is understood that I assume no obligations of any kind.

Name .....

Address .....

$1.00 Down— Brings This 5-Piece Boys' Complete Outfit

He'll be happy in this complete outfit.

A splendid value. We send you the complete outfit for only $1.00 down. If for any reason whatever you don't wish to keep it send it right back and your money will be returned instantly. Don't miss this opportunity. Order now while this offer is open.

Boys' "World Beater" Outfit

1 Double Breasted Norfolk Suit — **1 Stylish Scotch Golf Cap**
1 Fancy Striped Percale Waist — **1 Double Faced Poplin Tie**
1 Fancy Lawn Pocket Handkerchief

Our "World Beater" Suit is all that its name means. Dependable fabrics, perfectly made, stylish and at the same time will wear like iron. Made in newest double breasted style. Pleated back with yoke and belt all around. Coat strongly lined with twilled serge. Knickers full lined. Comes in fancy wool mixed Cassimeres in Blue, Brown, Green or Gray. Sizes 8 to 17.

Stylish Golf Cap—Made of imported Scotch plaids. Large visor fastens with snap. Leather sweat band.

Fancy Striped Waist—Made from durable, washable Percale. Perfect fitting yoke back. Outside pocket—cuff to button.

Handsome Four-in-hand Tie—Comes in solid colors in various rich shades. Reversible—two sides to wear.

Pocket Handkerchief—Made of soft, good quality linen with pretty fancy border.

Boys' Club Button with Every Suit

Be sure to give size of cap, also size and color of suit.

Order by No. S-10. Send only $1.00 with the coupon. Terms $3.50 monthly. Total price $21.95.

6 Months to Pay

Open a Charge Account

Just a few cents a day buys this complete outfit. No charge for the credit no matter where you live. No discount for cash. All business men use their credit. Use yours. See for yourself the splendid values we give you. Mail the coupon today.

Order Now

There's only a limited quantity of these outfits. Don't be too late. Don't miss this splendid value. Remember, you take no risk. Mail the coupon with a $1.00 P. O. order or a dollar bill. Send the coupon now.

Elmer Richards Co.

Dept. 1073, W. 35th St., CHICAGO

Write for our Free Catalog of Men's, Women's and Children's clothing. Everything on small, monthly payments.

Elmer Richards Co.
Dept. 1073, W. 35th St., Chicago

I enclose $1.00. Send the Boy's Outfit No. S-10.

Color suit..... Size suit.....Size cap.....

If I am not satisfied with the Boy's Outfit I can return it and get my payment back. Otherwise I will pay $3.50 monthly until $21.95 has been paid.

(This coupon must be signed by your mother or father.)

Name.....

Address.....

.....*State*.....